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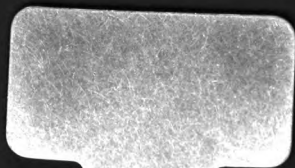
A DECK OF TROUBLES



By A. R. HOPE.



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A GOOD-NATURED ACTION.



Fig. 39.

A PECK OF TROUBLES.

AN ACCOUNT OF
CERTAIN MISFORTUNES WHICH HAPPENED TO
CERTAIN YOUNG PEOPLE OF WHITMINSTER.

BY
A. R. HOPE,

*Author of "Stories of Whitminster," "The Day after the Holidays," "The Day
before the Holidays," "My Schoolboy Friends," "George's Enemies,"
"Stories of Schoolboy Life," &c., &c.*



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P R E F A C E.

THE author of "A Peck of Troubles" has been accused of writing for boys only, but in these stories he has tried to show that he has something to say about boys and girls too. His object is to point out to young people how certain very common troubles, to which both boys and girls are liable, may often be met or avoided. And he will not grudge the trouble which it has taken him to write this book, if any of its readers should learn from it how to get out of trouble, or, what is better, to keep out of it.

A. R. H.

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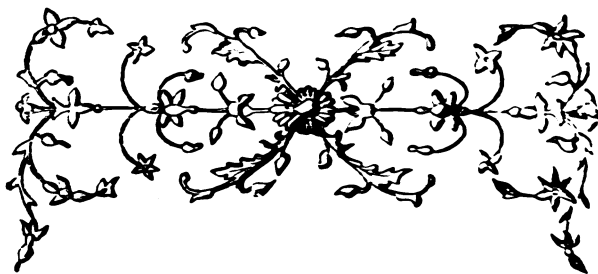


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MR. DALTON'S PRESCRIPTION.

CHAPTER I.

MONDAY.



It was a fine sunny afternoon. All over England one was pleased to think that clocks were striking the hour for thousands of happy boys to be released from school. The great clock of Whitminster was striking, at all events, and the Whitminster boys were trooping out, through the grey old cloisters, the young ones with shouting and frisking, the seniors more soberly, as beseemed their dignity, but almost all with evident pleasure. Some rushed off homewards without delay, small bands took their way to the cricket-grounds or the river bank, others

remained and got up extemporary games in the playground, where the striking of the minster clock produced as sudden and complete a change as came upon the silent side of Ben Ledi when Roderick Dhu's whistle—

“Garrisoned the glen
At once with full five hundred men,
As if the yawning hill to heaven
A subterranean host had given.”

Even so, whereas the sun's last lazy wink had lighted up a gravelled court ornamented by torn exercises, and inhabited by two fat, sleek rooks, who were pensively perambulating in the shadow of the fives courts, his next glance fell upon a lively scene where straw hats and ruddy cheeks seemed to spring up from the ground, and all the pillars in the cloisters were bristling into bat and wicket, and every quiet grey corner gave life to a jacketed hero armed for cricket. Nor, as has been already intimated, was the change less remarkable that had passed over the spirits and countenances of the said heroes. There was Brown secundus, on the first page of whose *Delectus* the tears were not yet dry, laughing as if Latin had never been invented, and naughty Jones skipping about as if there were no such things as impositions in the world and he had not got one, and little Robinson howling for mere happiness a

great deal louder than he had done under the cane half an hour before. Surely boys ought to be happy if they are able so soon and so easily to forget their troubles.

So thought Mr. Dalton, as he was coming out of school, fagged and worried, and not able to forget his troubles. This boy, in whose honour he thought he could have relied, he had discovered telling him a downright lie; that one he had been obliged to punish for bullying. A whole form had broken down in Euclid, and the master was not sure whether the boys' idleness or his own impatience were most at fault. Mrs. Somebody had written, in no very pleasant terms, to complain that her darling child did not seem to "make any progress," though in this case the master knew that he had tried his very best, and that the darling child was one of the idlest and worst-behaved boys in the school. All these troubles weighed upon him, and though he heaved a sigh of relief when he got into the bright fresh air, it was with something like envy that he saw the careless merriment of the boys, who could forget his wholesome severities more readily than he could.

But there was one boy whose frame of mind did not seem very cheerful, if one might judge from the listless fashion in which he was lounging along, hanging his head and keeping aloof from the sports

of the others. He paused a moment and cast a glance at a party who were playing fives, then turned away and passed out upon the Minster Green. Mr. Dalton watched him curiously, and resolved to make up to him. A few rapid steps placed him by the boy's side just as he was about to turn up one of the narrow streets that open on the Minster Green.

"What are you going to do, Carrison?" he asked, in a friendly tone.

"Home, sir, I suppose," said the boy, glancing at the little bundle of books that he carried under his arm.

"Come, Carrison, you are not going to set to work just yet; you had better come and have a cup of tea with me. Mrs. Dalton is not at home, and I shall be all alone."

"Thank you, sir," said Carrison, and turning back, he accompanied the master along another street, and in a few minutes they found themselves in Mr. Dalton's house.

Mr. Dalton was accustomed to entertaining the boys of the school, and had the knack of making them feel quite at home, so presently Rodney Carrison, who was of a somewhat reserved disposition, found himself chatting perhaps more freely than he would have done with most of his school-fellows. Till the tea-things were taken away the-

master kept up the conversation upon various subjects of no great importance; then suddenly he wheeled his chair round, looked the boy full in the face, and said,—

“Rodney, are you in trouble about anything?”

The boy started and blushed at the abruptness of this question, but he answered in a tone that did not seem to be concealing anything. “No, sir; nothing particular. I don’t know what you mean.”

“Well, there’s something the matter, I am sure. I have watched you for a long time, and seen that you are unhappy. Come, my boy, won’t you tell me all about it and let me help you? Are you happy?”

“Happy?” said Rodney, doubtfully. “Why not?”

“That’s what I want to know. Has anything happened to-day?”

“I have had three propositions of Euclid to write out from Mr. Willoughby.”

“It is not often that you have impositions, I should think; but that isn’t enough to make a boy look so gloomy. What was it for?”

“He said I was rude.”

“I suppose you were. Why, may I ask? Come, shouldn’t I make a good lawyer? I shall get it all out of you by cross-examination.”

"I know I was rude, but I didn't mean to be. I was out of temper," said Rodney, with a slight, a very slight smile.

"We are getting to it now. What put you out of temper?"

"I don't know. A lot of things. Everything seemed to go wrong with me to-day. Everything always does!" cried Rodney, with a sudden flash of discontent.

"Surely not. We have all our little troubles, but you boys ought to be able to prevent them from preying on your minds. Why don't you go and have a good game with some of the other fellows, and forget all about it?"

"They don't care to have me. I'm not good at games."

"I understand you. You are short-sighted, fond of reading, and so you have grown up a little awkward, and not active in your habits. I think it is a pity you should not try to take more exercise. I am sure you would work better, and feel more cheerful if you did."

"I don't know. I have tried. I don't much care for the other boys, sir, and they don't like me."

"Naturally, if you don't like them. So you confess, after all, that you are unhappy?"

"I believe I am," said Rodney, reluctantly, begin-

ning to pick to pieces a faded rose that he had in his button-hole. Then he spoke up and attacked the rose more savagely, and with each word a leaf fell on the carpet. "I know I don't feel happy, but I don't see how it can be helped. It's nobody's fault."

"But it can be helped," said Mr. Dalton, in a loud cheery tone, noticing with kindly eye the boy's heaving chest and downcast face. "And it must be helped. And it shall be helped. Look here, Rodney; I know all about it."

Rodney looked up, and there were tears in his eyes. Mr. Dalton stood on the hearth-rug beside him and went on:—

"You are more thoughtful and less given to exercise than most boys, and you are not of such a cheerful temperament as most boys. I have known you all your life, Rodney, and I knew your poor father before you were born; you are just like him. It is a great pity to have a disposition so melancholy, but many people are so constituted by nature, and they must treat it as they would do any other disease. First of all, it will never do you or anybody the least good to blame your troubles on anybody else. For instance, if Mr. Willoughby gave you an imposition for being rude, I am sure he thought that you deserved it, and what is more, I am

sure he feels quite miserable to think that you have been rude."

"Oh, I don't blame him!"

"And as for the boys who, you say, dislike you. Is it not that you are shy and disobliging towards them, and not happy in their company, and have pursuits of your own in which they take no interest, and too often let them see you give way to fits of temper when they tease you a little, and perhaps don't let you have your own way?"

"I dare say that's it. They say I am glum, and so I am. I can't help it. It seems to come upon me like illness."

"I know what it is. So am I sometimes. You feel everything going wrong—nothing gives you pleasure—you would like to knock your head against the wall. I assure you there are remedies; I have found them successful. First of all, you don't feel so when you are doing your work, do you?"

"No—not often. But you can't be always at lessons."

"That's true. Well, we'll talk of playtimes. I can give you a prescription which is certain, if taken regularly, to dispel glumness, low spirits, melancholy, sulks, despair, despondency, and all the rest of it."

"I should like to know what it is," said Rodney, smiling.

"You have heard it recommended often, I dare say ; so have most people ; but the worst of it is that nobody believes that it can do good till he has tried it, and few people can bring themselves to give it a fair trial. The great difficulty which all doctors find is, I fancy, to get people to know what is good for them."

"It must be hard to take, then, sir."

"Some people seem to find it so ; I don't know. I am sure it is better to take it than to suffer from the disease we have been speaking of."

"I should like to try it."

"If I give you this prescription, will you promise to use it at least once a day for the rest of the week ?"

"Yes, sir."

"And next Saturday you shall take a walk with me, and let me know if you feel any better for my remedy."

Mr. Dalton went to his writing-table and wrote something on a slip of paper, which he folded up and gave to Rodney.

"This is my prescription. It is to be taken upon a moderate diet, and with plenty of work and exercise. Laziness and over-eating are the most common causes of your disease."

"Very well, sir," said Rodney, not quite sure whether to treat the matter as a joke or not.

"Now run off home and set about your lessons, or

I shall begin my cure badly by getting you into another scrape with Mr. Willoughby."

So Rodney said good evening, took his cap, and set off for home. But you may be sure he was very curious to know what Mr. Dalton's cure was, and as soon as he was out of sight of the house he stopped and opened the paper. Here were its contents:—

"PRESCRIPTION FOR UNHAPPINESS.

1 oz. of giving up one's way for somebody,

2 oz. of doing kind things for anybody,

3 oz. of speaking kindly to everybody.

To be taken frequently.

F. G. D."

Rodney smiled as he read this strange prescription ; but he knew Mr. Dalton, and understood what he meant. Then the smile gave way to a reflective look, and he walked on thinking over the master's advice. This boy was thoughtful above his years, and could see better than most boys the value of good advice. He knew that he was selfish and unsociable, and that he could not be as cheerful as other boys without being more like them in this respect. It seemed very easy, too.

"I'll try it," said Rodney to himself, quickening his pace. "But I don't know how I am to get a chance."

He was passing the school at this moment, and one of the Sargents, his schoolfellows and neighbours, pounced upon him.



"COME ALONG, CARRISON."

“Oh, here you are—just in time! All the fellows have gone except the two Greys and me, and we want another to make up a game at fives. Come along, Carrison.”

“I can’t. I must go home and do my lessons,” said Rodney, hurrying on, for he didn’t care about playing fives, especially with Sargent, who laughed at his want of skill.

“Bother your lessons! you are always sweating away at them,” was this youth’s grumbling reply, as he turned back into the cloisters. “You could do them afterwards easily if you liked.”

So Rodney was aware, and then he suddenly bethought him of Mr. Dalton’s prescription. Here was a chance. He turned and ran after Sargent.

“All right. I’ll come. I needn’t begin my work just yet.”

“Oh, that’s jolly. You’re a brick after all!” cried Sargent, seizing him by the collar of his jacket and dragging him towards the fives court.

They played till it began to grow dusk, and the old porter came to turn them out. Rodney got on better than he had expected, and Sargent didn’t laugh at him, and he put himself into a fine healthy glow that drove out the *glumness* from his heart; and as he walked home he chatted quite gaily with the

other boys, and set to work at his lessons in wonderful spirits, and said to himself,—

“I’m glad I went and played. I wonder I never tried it before. I must play with some of the fellows every day after this.”





CHAPTER II.

TUESDAY.

NEXT morning Rodney was minded to get up at five, and asked Nelly, his mother's old and somewhat crabbed servant, to wake him at that hour. Nelly promised to do so, but not without a certain amount of grumbling, for she was getting lazy, and began to feel that her old bones were not what they had once been. Then Rodney remembered and said,—

“Never mind, Nelly. Don't you get up sooner than you wish. I dare say I shall awake soon enough of my own accord.”

“What did you ask me for, then?” snarled Nelly. “You never think about the trouble you give, do you, boys?” and Rodney felt inclined to tell her, as he had often done before, that she was a cross old

thing. But just in time he remembered his prescription, and answered in what he meant for a very conciliatory tone, though I fear it was a failure,—

“Why, Nelly, I don’t want to give you trouble; that’s just it.”

“Oh yes! I dare say!” cried Nelly, incredulously, for though she was a good old body at heart, she was crusty in her ways and words.

This was rather discouraging to Rodney, and he vowed to himself as he snatched his bedroom candle from her, that he wouldn’t try his prescription on Nelly again. Mr. Dalton should have been at hand to tell him that the power of this prescription is best shown on those who do not invite its application; but he wasn’t, and Rodney settled with himself that Nelly was a sulky old creature, quite unworthy of his consideration, and that he himself was a most self-denying and polite young man. And he resolved to awake himself and get up as early as possible, and strangely enough, as he thought, he woke exactly at the hour he had fixed on—five o’clock. For a few minutes he lay quiet, lazily watching the golden sunshine on the grey-papered wall, and enjoying the delicious sensation of an honest doze which one has purchased for one’s self by awaking sooner than usual. Then he remembered his resolution to get up, and without giving himself time to think about it, made

a spring out of bed, and presently was splashing in the basin.

A few minutes for his toilet and asking God's blessing for the day, and down he sat to his books, and made sure of his lessons. He read over his Latin composition, and found out a mistake; he copied out his verses fairly; he took another look at his Virgil, and found some lines grow clear over which the evening before he had been puzzling hopelessly; a good half-hour he gave to his repetition—always a sore subject,—and finally he indulged in a brave wrestle with that monster Euclid, and vanquished him so completely and undoubtedly that the quiet and undemonstrative Rodney was moved to fling the book up to the ceiling, and give a subdued shout in honour of his victory. Next came the imposition, half of which had been already written; it was now finished carefully and neatly, and not in a hasty scribble, such as had often caused Rodney to have his impositions to do over again, and in consequence made him sulky and sorrowful.

There was no fear of such a misfortune this time, however, and when the lines were written, Rodney surveyed them with complacency, and felt in good spirits and kindly disposed to all the world. Then finding he had an hour on hand before breakfast, he bethought him how he could be of service to anybody.

Why, his mother had said that she particularly wanted to get a letter early that morning, and had wished she could spare a servant to send to the post-office. She never thought of asking her lazy and selfish son. The very thing! Rodney got his cap and started off for the post-office, thoroughly enjoying the walk through the clear, fresh morning air, getting the letter his mother wished, and another unexpected one for himself, and then returning home to eat an excellent breakfast, and to receive a grateful kiss, which could not but give him pleasure, even accompanied, as it was, by a look of surprise which ought to have wounded him to the heart. Rodney was not celebrated for putting himself out of his way to oblige people. But then he must needs go spoiling the effect of it all by feeling ashamed of his fit of good-nature, and the pleased look disappeared from his mother's face when he said,—

“I wanted to go to the post, anyhow.”

This was untrue, unnecessary, and unkind. But Rodney did not reflect that a kind heart should be shown not only in doing kind actions, but in the way of doing them, and it never struck him that his mother would have valued a little service of this sort more highly if she had been left to suppose that it was undertaken altogether for her sake. Only fears and sorrows of our own, can teach us that know-

ledge of and consideration for the feelings of others, which are seen in the conduct of those whom we call *gentle* men and women.

Fears and sorrows, perhaps, were to come to Rodney; in the meantime he was hurrying down to school, feeling very well satisfied with himself, and fully persuaded that there was something in Mr. Dalton's plan for curing unhappiness.

"But how am I to get a chance of trying it at school?" he said to himself.

How could he miss one? In a minute he came upon young Jacko Thompson, Dr. Thompson's boy, who, so late in the half, had been sent as a new boy to the grammar school, that he might be able to acclimatize himself betimes in the bleak atmosphere of schoolboy life. He was to have been escorted by his cousin Fred Grey, but for some reason or other Fred hadn't turned up, and poor Jacko, tearful and disconsolate, was crouching down under the wall of the cloisters, and would not so much as set foot within the gates of the awful temple of Minerva. A crowd of small boys surrounded him, laughing, wondering, and increasing his alarm. One or two big fellows stopped to ask what was the matter, and being informed that it was only a "cub" who trembled to be brought into the dread presence of Learning, smiled or sneered and passed by on the

other side. So Rodney was about to do, but he didn't. He came up to the little fellow, who knew him well, and cheered him up, and tickled away his fears, and made him dry his tears with a little kindly encouragement, and succeeded in persuading him to enter the school, and there placed him in charge of Mr. Bentley, who received this young lamb with effusion, and promised to tend him gently and carefully.

Rodney was astonished to find himself doing all this with such a good grace, but he was glad that he had a chance of doing it, for he did not forget, as some boys do, the day when he was a frightened, puny urchin, shivering at the same dark gate, and thinking of the master as an ogre who loved to grind the bones of boys, and he knew how valuable was one friendly word to such a desolate and disheartened little stranger.

Nor was this the only kind action which suggested itself to Rodney in the course of the morning. When he took up his imposition to Mr. Willoughby, he was moved to say, "I am afraid, sir, you thought I meant to be rude to you yesterday. I am sorry I gave you any trouble. I will try not to do it again."

"Oh no! Yes! Not at all! I'm sure you didn't!" blundered out Mr. Willoughby, quite taken aback

by this apology, the tone of which was so very unexpected.

Indeed, boys don't often indulge in apologies, and most boys, having made up their minds to such a thing, would have been much more sheepish over it. But Rodney was gifted with greater self-possession and facility of expressing himself than is generally the case with boys of his age, so it was no very hard thing for him to come out with such a speech. All the same, though, it gave more pleasure than might be supposed to Mr. Willoughby, who was always distressing himself by the fear that he was too severe towards the boys, and seldom perhaps inflicted a punishment without longing to be able to settle the matter in a more friendly way ; for Mr. Willoughby was new to boys, and had not yet learned that most of them take these little misfortunes very philosophically—considering.

All the rest of the day Rodney felt cheerful, and did his work well, and got capital marks, and evidently increased his chance of the first prize in his form, for which he and another boy were supposed to be running a very close race. And when school was over he promised himself a good game at fives, and then a long and hearty spell at his lessons. But to his no small dissatisfaction, the first part of this programme was interfered with, for all the

fellows were going to a cricket-match, and he could find no one to play with him. Rodney did not care for cricket—he was too short-sighted to enter into the game,—and after trying to amuse himself by a little solitary practice in the ball-court, he went home in a mood of disappointment and disgust, such as he was too familiar with, and resolved to console himself by getting vindictively to work at his lessons.

“Now, then—I am getting into the dumps again,” he said to himself as he turned over the pages of the dictionary. “I won’t—I shan’t give in to it. But I can’t help it—it will come—I shan’t do my work half so well—if I could only shake it off somehow or other! Oh dear! what shall I do?”

“Rodney,” said the voice of his little brother Nelson, “I do so wish you would help me with this Delectus. You can’t think how hard it is!”

“Get away, you little donkey,” growled Rodney. “Do you think I have nothing to do but bother about your rubbishing Delectus? I have quite enough to do with my own work.”

“But just one minute.”

“Be quiet. When I was a small cub I had always to do my own lessons without anybody helping me, and I don’t see why you shouldn’t.”

“But you are cleverer than me. I can’t do it, and



RODNEY AND NELSON.

we are all to be kept in to-morrow afternoon if we can't say it."

"Serve you right," was Rodney's comment.

Mrs. Carrison was sitting by the window of the room in which the two boys were doing their lessons, and though she did not seem to notice it, not a word of this conversation escaped her. She bent over her knitting and sighed. She had spoiled Rodney as a child, and was unable to manage him now that he was growing up so fast to be a man. To see his selfishness cut her to the heart, for she felt that it was to a great extent her own fault, and feared that she could not cure him of it. So she sat silent and sad, and thought of the day when she was left a widow with these two boys and one girl to educate and send out into the world.

What was her surprise and delight when, in a few minutes, she saw Rodney rise from his seat and cross over to his brother's side of the table.

"Come, Nel," he said, with unusual friendliness "I haven't so much to do, after all. I can spare you a minute. Where's this horrid Delectus? Let's see him; I'll soon settle him."

"Oh, you're a brick, Rodney!" cried the little chap, brightening up, and producing his book and the sheet of paper on which he was vainly trying to make out the meaning of his lesson.

"What's this? *Pauperiem*, poverty; *modico contentus*, a little contented; *semper amavi*, always loves. What nonsense you make of it, Nelson!"

"Well, I'm sure I've looked up all the words, and that is what it gives. I *can't* do any better—I can't indeed."

"All right, I'll help you out. You see *pauperiem* is accusative, and you must begin with the nominative. Now just look here."

And he helped Nelson right through the lesson, and did not leave him till he had written it all down and was in a fair way of learning it off by heart.

"Oh, I shall say it like a house on fire to-morrow," cried Nelson, gleefully.

"And the other fellows will all make a row about me helping you," said Rodney, as if he had begun to repent of his outburst of brotherliness.

But all the same, when he went back to his own books he felt much more cheerful, and he smiled as he thought of the usefulness of Mr. Dalton's prescription, and wondered it had never occurred to him to try it before. And his mother, looking at him and seeing him smile, could not tell what to make of it at first.

"I must have misunderstood him," she thought. "He has not a bad heart—he does think of others, thank God."

So that night in that house three people sat down to supper feeling happier than they would have done if Rodney had not remembered what none of us ought ever to forget.

“ Now, then, what else can I do for anybody before I go to bed ? ” thought Rodney, feeling in high good humour with himself and everybody. “ Nothing !— Stop ! write to my sister. Of course. It’s a horrid bother, and I hate having to do it, but she is always glad to get a letter from any of us, and so should I be if I was at a boarding school away from home. Well, I don’t know. I feel sleepy, and I want to get up early. I think I shall go to bed and write to Lucy to-morrow—no I won’t, though. Here goes ! ”

And sitting down, Rodney took the trouble to write a long letter to his little sister, telling her all the chronicles of the juvenile society of Whitminster, —how Fanny Seddon had got the measles, and uncle Alfred had a new pony, and the Jacksons were going away to live in London, and the boys all said that Mr. Williamson was going to be married, and the school was going to have a holiday next day, for Miss Hathaway’s marriage, and two of the old elms on the Minster Green had been cut down, and the marks for the half-year were being added up, and some fellows thought he might

get the prize in his form, and Nelson was as lively as usual, and didn't so often get kept in by old Bentley, and mamma sent her love, and was not so often troubled by her headaches, and he was very well, and remained her affectionate brother, Rodney.

He finished his letter with a comic picture of Nelson, tearing his hair in wild despair over a sum in compound proportion, and then sealed it up, and was very glad he had written it.

So was Lucy when it was laid on her plate at tea-time next day, just after she had been crying her little blue eyes out over a scrape which she got into with the French governess.





CHAPTER III.

WEDNESDAY.

THIS was a great day, for on it was celebrated no less an event than the marriage of the dean's daughter to Sir Richard Hartis. What Whitminster man, woman, or boy—and, dear me, have I forgotten the girls?—was not interested in this auspicious union, and who was not willing to make holiday in honour of it? Of course the Grammar School had a holiday, and our friends the Carrisons, like the rest, were able to stay in bed, and awake to the luxurious sensation of having all the day before them, and lie lazily listening to the merry peal rung out by the Minster bells, and wish that the dean had something over three hundred daughters who would oblige the community by getting married every day in the year.

And it was just the day for a marriage and for a holiday. A shower had fallen through the night, to lay the dust, but now there was not a cloud in the June sky, and only enough wind to make the shady side of the Minster green deliciously cool. And in due time the lazy schoolboys came down to breakfast, and entered upon the great question of—what to do with it?

At the Carrisons' breakfast-table, their mother opened the subject by announcing that she had received a letter from their uncle, who was going to call that morning——

"And drive us out to spend the day, isn't he, mamma? Oh, how jolly!" cried Nelson, clapping his hands and spilling his coffee for delight.

"Not so fast, Nel. Uncle only invites one of you to come with me. Which is it to be?"

"Oh, me!" said Nelson, looking eagerly at his elder brother.

"No, indeed," protested Rodney. "You went last time, and it's my turn now."

"I suppose it is," said Nelson, sorrowfully. "The gooseberries are just ripe, and uncle promised to show me how to make a boat."

"Well, you'll have to wait till next time, that's all," said Rodney, applying himself to his bread and butter.

Poor Nelson's face grew overcast with clouds of disappointment, and Mrs. Carrison looked from one to the other, and felt for her younger son ; for she knew what a treat to him it was to spend a day at his uncle's. But she said nothing, and it was understood by all that Rodney was to go.

As soon as Rodney had satisfied his self-love by carrying this point, he began to be uneasy in his mind about it ; for Mr. Dalton's prescription had already had the effect of preventing him from finding the satisfaction he had once done in having his own way. As he strolled out into their little garden, to sit with a book in his favourite seat on the swing under a spreading chestnut tree, he allowed himself to get into conversation with an invisible adviser, of whose existence he had lately become aware.

"Give it up," said this adviser, whom we have all heard of under the name of conscience. "Why?" replied self, in an injured tone. "It would be kind," said conscience. "But I want to go to my uncle's," said self. "But it will give Nelson three times as much pleasure," said conscience. "I don't know about that," said self. "Yes, you do ; don't tell stories," said conscience, sternly. "You know you can amuse yourself in many other ways, and it will do your long legs a world of good to walk over to your uncle's another time." "But Nelson has had

his turn," said self, querulously. "I don't know that I shouldn't have my own way sometimes." "Much good it does you," replied conscience. "Come, be a good fellow, and make Nelson happy." "And be bored to death all day myself, I suppose." "Are you going to do a kind thing, or are you not?" asked conscience. "Well, have it your own way," growled self.

And in very much the same tone Rodney might presently be heard summoning his brother all over the house.

"Are *you* beginning now?" was Nelly's ungracious reply to his inquiry. "Master Nelson, indeed! If he was anywhere in the house, you couldn't help hearing him. Hasn't he been driving me wild with his racket all the morning? And didn't ye hear him banging the front door not two minutes ago? You might have thought the house was coming down."

Up went the parlour window, and out went Rodney's head, and there was Nelson wandering along the street in an aimless manner, suited to neither schoolday nor holiday, and not with the brisk step of a boy who knows what he is going to do with himself.

"Come here, Nelson, this moment," bawled Rodney, and his brother came running back to the open window.

This is what Rodney wished to communicate to his brother. "Now, Nelson, I am going to be very unselfish, and to let you go to my uncle's; and you must be very grateful, and think me a very fine fellow, and all the rest of it." But something whispered to him not to make a fool of himself, and made him say abruptly,—

"You are to go to uncle's, Nelson. I'm not going; I don't care about it."

"Now don't be gruff about it," said conscience, "or you may spoil half his pleasure;" and Rodney so far recognised the wisdom of this advice that he shut down the window, ran off, and left the house by the back door before Nelson had time to thank him.

He did not make his exit so hurriedly but that he had time to snatch up a bit of bread and cheese from the pantry, and put his favourite book, "Marmion," in his pocket. With these he intended to spend a whole day out of doors, and amuse himself after his own devices. There was a shady spot on the bank of the river that was a favourite resort of his, and thither he now bent his steps, thinking as he went that he was a very generous and superior character, and that nobody appreciated him properly, and that it was rather a fine thing than otherwise. In fact, he was quite in a mood to give himself up to a

pleasing fit of mild melancholy and misanthropy. For there is a pleasure in these feelings when we first begin to indulge them.

But from this silly mood Rodney was roused by the book he had in his pocket. When he had lain on the grass for half an hour and read "Marmion," he had forgotten all about himself, and was thinking only of the battle of Flodden. There is no nonsense in that poetry—nothing to make you whine and fancy yourself an interesting and injured innocent; nothing but what is healthy and stirring. Rodney could never read it without being carried off the legs of his mind, so to speak, and borne away to a sort of enchanted land far from Whitminster, where people wore armour, and rode prancing coursers, and fought for the right, and galloped about redressing injuries and protecting the weak; and where craven knights and cruel tyrants only existed to be unhorsed and dethroned by the heroes whom Rodney loved to fancy himself. Now, as he read, he could plainly see the English host crossing the Till and marching against the inactive Scots; he heard the trumpet sound and the shouts of "St. George for merrie England!" The hosts met, backwards the foes were borne, down went horse and rider, standards were torn from dying hands, plumes were shorn and lances shivered; the stream ran red with blood; the shout

of victory rose above the din; and Rodney was striding along the bank of the river, waving an imaginary sword above his head, and reciting out loud in a style that might have made a spectator think him fit for the neighbouring lunatic asylum.

“Oh, these were the times to live in!” he thought or said to himself. “Then people could be brave and noble, and go about doing good. I am sure I shouldn’t have been sulky or selfish if I had lived in these times; but now there’s no getting a chance of showing that you wish to succour the helpless.”

“Oh, here’s big Carrison!” exclaimed a voice, rudely interrupting this rhapsody; and looking up, Rodney found the exalted strain of his thoughts broken by what seemed a very commonplace scene of real life.

A tribe of small Grammar-School boys were bathing in the river, or rather, had been bathing; for now they were gathered on the bank in a naked crowd, and ruefully looking into the blue water. The matter was, that a passing butcher’s boy had thrown two or three boots belonging to members of the party into the very middle of the river, where they thought it too deep to venture. None of them could swim; to walk home in one boot is not pleasant, especially when you have to face a displeased parent at the end of the journey, and therefore the bootless or semi-

booted urchins hailed the appearance of tall Rodney with great satisfaction, and hastened to explain to him the state of the case.

“Well, what can I do?” said Rodney, not very graciously; for you will understand that he was an upper fourth-form fellow—no less, and that these were only young “cubs” who were addressing him so familiarly.

“It isn’t beyond your depth,” said a little boy, forgetful of the dignity of the person from whom he was asking such a favour.

Rodney hesitated. He didn’t like going into the water—and to oblige such little cubs too! But what said his prescription? He would do it, he said to himself, with an unspoken grumble, and began to throw off his clothes.

“How stupid you are to let people throw boots about,” he said; and having thus relieved his mind, he went into the water, and was not long in fishing up the unfortunate boots, which did not seem so much the worse, after all.

Being in the water, he found it so agreeable that he thought he might as well stay a little longer. And as there was no one present but small boys, all professedly ignorant of the art of swimming, he thought he would try his hands at that exercise, which he had eschewed for some time, because the last time

he had attempted it, the Sargents laughed at his clumsy struggles and useless puffings. He tried again, and was astonished to find that this time he seemed much more at home in the water, and actually made some progress. Here was a welcome discovery ; for Rodney was once rather fond of the water, and had only given up bathing because he couldn't bear not to be able to swim like his companions. So now he felt grateful to the butcher's boy who had thrown the boots into the water, and made a resolution to come down to the river and practise swimming every morning till he should be fit to appear before the critical public of his own form.

The bath, and the feeling that he had done a good-natured action, quite exhilarated Rodney ; and when he had rubbed himself dry, and put on his clothes, he entirely forgot that he was the same boy who only that morning had resolved to be ill-used and unhappy. This was Mr. Dalton's doing.

But when he had walked along the bank for half a mile, he suddenly remembered who he was, and began to distrust his present high spirits.

"I shall feel horrid in a little time, I know I shall," said he to himself. "Whenever I feel jolly, the other thing always comes after it; and I can't keep myself from getting into the dumps. Stop, let me

see! I won't feel unhappy if I can help it. I must do something for somebody. Who shall it be? That's the difficulty. If I only had somebody to suggest something. What shall I do?"

This question was addressed to nobody in particular; but conscience took it up, and made reply,—

"Something to do? The difficulty is in the number of things which you might do. For instance: here is Miss Bramwell, your old governess, who is bedridden. You know she doats on wild flowers, and I am sure she would be pleased beyond measure if she saw a large bouquet of them by her bedside, and thought that her troublesome old pupil had taken the trouble to walk to Henchley Wood and gather them. She is a cross and impatient old maid, is she? You know you don't like her, and you fancy she doesn't like you. All the better. The more unexpected a kindness is, the more pleasure it gives. Besides, the walk would be a capital thing for you, who take so little exercise and read so much. And if you walk fast, and recite 'Marmion' to yourself as you go, you will not care to feel unhappy; and afterwards the joy which you will be carrying to Miss Bramwell's sick room will make your way home a veritable path of flowers."

I fear my pen has run away with me here. I am not sure that Rodney's conscience ever said all this,

nor do I know what he replied to it; but what I do know is this, that an hour afterwards he entered Henchley Wood, and setting to work picked wild flowers—white anemones, gay dog-roses, scarlet pimpernels, sweet wild honeysuckle, and a dozen other kinds, half the names of which were unknown to him. Indeed, Rodney had never taken much interest in plants; but he knew that these, even the humblest of them, were loved by the cross old maid for whom he gathered them. And because he gathered them from love, every common flower which he had thoughtlessly crushed under foot a hundred times now poured out a sweet perfume into his heart. For the humblest act of love cannot be unblessed, even though it be done by an awkward schoolboy, with his arms growing too long for his sleeves. When he had gathered a large nosegay, he sat down and ate his bread and cheese with a good appetite, washing down the meal with water from a rippling brook, and adding by way of dessert some wild strawberries, which were provokingly small because of their sweetness, and provokingly sweet because of their smallness. And then he lay under an oak tree and watched the sunbeams stealing through the hazel shade upon a carpet of grass and daisies, and listened to the clear, gay notes of the birds, and was fanned by the June breeze, and entranced, as it were, by the

spell of the golden air of a summer afternoon. And with some pure sunbeam, or some sweet thrush's note, there stole into his heart the blessed thought that this world was a good and happy place, in which men were made to be good and happy ; and for the moment he felt how vile were all evil tempers and selfish desires that cloud for us the face of God's heaven. Or was it the wild flowers that had taught him that happiness is not to be found in the gay and noisy highway of the world's pleasures, but rather in quiet, peaceful nooks, into which, perhaps, we turn aside to do some kindly deed, and blessing, are blessed of the spirit of love ?

The sunlight was growing more golden, and the shadows of the trees were lengthening out, when Rodney took his way homewards, carrying his wild flowers with him. These he duly left for Miss Bramwell, and arrived at home just as Nelly was laying the cloth for a sort of hybrid meal, half dinner, half tea, the prospect of which was not unwelcome to him. And in five minutes came the dog-cart, with his mother and Nelson.

"Oh, Rodney," cried the small boy, bursting into the hall, "we have had *such* fun !" Then he checked his enthusiasm, and said, "But are you *sure* you didn't want to go ?"

And when Rodney replied, it was without the least

trace of the sullen, constrained manner in which he gave up his way in the morning.

"I am glad you went, Nelson," he said, heartily. "I have been out for a walk, and enjoyed myself a great deal more than I should have done at my uncle's."





CHAPTER IV.

THURSDAY.

AND now came another great day for the Whitminster boys. The examination was approaching, and on the Thursday* before, it was customary to read out the names of all the boys who had gained prizes in their forms by the marks of the half-year, leaving the field clear for those contests that were to be decided by competition, and putting the boys out of pain at once, not keeping them in suspense till the last moment, as is done in some schools, for the sake, I suppose, of dramatic effect. We had always this sort of undress rehearsal, so to speak, and then the minds of the successful candidates were left free to prepare them for the public ceremony of the presentation of prizes—no trifling ordeal at any time for a small boy, and certainly not

so when his part in it comes upon him, perhaps, in the form of a surprise.

So you will please imagine the whole school gathered together in the large schoolroom, for once eagerly listening to every word that fell from their master's lips. If you look along the row of faces you can easily tell who know that their names are to be read out and are trying unsuccessfully to look indifferent, who are not sure and are trying not to look anxious, who are certain that they have no chance whatever, and are either resigned, or envious or wholly interested in the fate of others. Our friend Rodney's face bespoke him as belonging to the second class; for all the half Rodney had run a close race with Charles Hammersley, and even now he hoped and doubted, and feared, and took courage by turns. It was some time till he was put out of suspense, because the list began to be read at the bottom; and before his part of the school was arrived at, he was obliged impatiently to listen to the record of triumphs gained by the small boys—triumphs greatly interesting to them, no doubt, but not to an exalted personage like Rodney, whose eagerness, again was a matter of indifference to the loftier dignitaries of the sixth form. Such is the way of the world—every one for himself.

At length his turn came, and Mr. Dalton, before

making the important discovery, entered upon a tantalizing preface, which kept him in suspense some little time longer.

“It is unusually difficult to settle who shall have the prize in this form. One boy—Hammersley—was clearly ahead in marks so long as he was with us, but you all know that he has been absent from illness for some weeks, and during that time has, of course, lost ground. So the largest number of marks has been gained by another boy, who would almost certainly have held only the second place if Hammersley had been able to compete with him throughout the half. It is hard not to seem unjust to one or other of these two, and I regret it all the more as they have both worked very creditably ; but, after consideration, we seem scarcely justified in giving a prize merely because of the likelihood that it would have been gained. The first place, therefore, will belong to Carrison Primus.”

Rodney tried not to blush and smile as the cheering broke forth which greeted this announcement, but he could not help it. It was not very hearty cheering—not so loud as greeted fellows who were greater favourites,—but it was very gratifying to a boy who liked other people’s good opinion, and had only this one chance of gaining the applause of his schoolfellows ; for, as you have already learned,

Rodney was no hero on the cricket or football field. For a minute and longer he seemed to have arrived at the height of human happiness. Why should he care about the other names which were being read out? He thought of how long he had wished and worked for this distinction. Then he pictured to himself his mother's pride and delight. Again, his reflections took a selfish turn, and he rehearsed in his mind's eye the enthusiasm which would greet his appearance at the prize-giving ceremony, the dignified way in which he would walk up to receive his prize, the admiration and envy which everybody who saw him would feel. Poor Rodney! He was indeed vain and foolish; but if he had been wiser, you know, there would not have been this story to write about him.

At all events, there was no thought in his mind of feeling unhappy. In the highest spirits he bounced out into the playground, and strutted about, expecting that everybody would congratulate him. So some boys did, but the effect of their congratulations was more than marred by the greater number who seemed to think it necessary to condole with Hammersley. What business had they to say that they were sorry he was not to get the prize? And what business had Hammersley to walk about looking so disappointed?

"Why, you know very well," said conscience, unexpectedly making his appearance in the playground, seen by Rodney only and invisible to all the others, as the goddess was revealed to the wrathful Achilles—"You know very well," said conscience, sternly. "Didn't he, too, wish and expect to get the prize? and hasn't he, too, got a mother who——"

"Oh, don't say such things!" said Rodney to his conscience, and walked rapidly off. "Hammersley would have been uncommonly glad if he had been first, so I am right to feel glad that he isn't," he muttered to himself, hoping, however, that conscience didn't hear him.

Rodney set off for what he intended should be a solitary walk, but conscience went with him all the way. He resolved not to think of Hammersley, but he was so angry with him for looking disappointed that he could think of nothing else. When he had gone one mile, he ceased to feel happy that he had won the prize. When he had gone two, he began to be disgusted because he could not feel happy that he had won the prize. When he had gone three, he became quite unhappy at feeling disappointed because he could not feel happy that he had won the prize. When he had gone four, he wished that Hammersley had not deserved it, as Rodney began to think he did. Then he sat down and wished

that Hammersley had got the prize, since he had deserved it.

He soon rose and walked back, but his reflections did not come to an end. The first mile he devoted to wishing again that Hammersley had not deserved the prize. For the second mile, he wished that he himself had not got it. The third mile, he wished that he could give it up. When he entered upon the fourth mile he resolved, first, that he couldn't; and, second, that he ought to give it up. And then he thought of Mr. Dalton's prescription.

All this time Mr. Willoughby, the master of Rodney's form, was still in the school; for you will understand that, on this particular morning, the masters had allowed their boys to go away early, while they remained to add up marks, to make arrangements for the coming examination, to talk over matters in general, perhaps—how can I know for certain what sort of business is transacted in the awful conclaves of these black-robed beings—I, who to this day can never behold the meekest of dominies without silent awe? At all events, Mr. Willoughby had finished his business, such as it was, and was locking up his desk preparatory to departure, when he was burst in upon by Rodney, with a very hot, red face, that showed he had been making haste, and a sort of sheepish look that seemed to show that

he was ashamed of some folly. So the master thought for the moment, at least; but he was wrong, for Rodney felt ashamed only because he had made up his mind to do a virtuous action.

"Please, sir," he began, speaking very fast, "do you think I could give up the prize and let Hammersley have it? because I think it would be fairer. Don't you think so, sir?"

Mr. Willoughby looked surprised—pleased as well.

"You need not scruple about the fairness of the matter. The prize is yours *fairly* enough, since it has been adjudged to you by the opinion of all the masters."

"But you know, sir, I should never have got it if Hammersley hadn't been ill. He was a long way ahead of me in marks, and he worked a great deal better, and I know he expected it, and I think he had better have it. I had rather he had it—I would indeed," affirmed Rodney, trying hard to convince himself as well as the master.

"This is very generous of you, Carrison. I must say that I think you are right about Hammersley having deserved the prize by his exertions, and it will be a kind and, in one sense, a just thing, if you give up your claims to him. But you must think over it, and not act rashly."

"No, sir; I won't think. I am sure it would be right. I *daren't* think about it," said Rodney, looking into the master's face with a smile, for his manner had won the boy's confidence. "Will you please tell him, sir?" And with this Rodney backed out more abruptly than was quite polite, as if he felt unable to trust his resolution a minute longer.

It was done now, and could not be undone, and he was not sorry, though he began to look forward to what seemed the worst part of the sacrifice—the curious looks and inquiries of his schoolfellows and the astonishment with which they would hear that he had acted so unselfishly. Fond of the good opinion of others as Rodney was, he shrunk, as many of us would have shrunk, from publicly appearing in a more than usually generous character. For we mortals love goodness less than we fear gossip, and blush to be found out of the highway of customary give-and-take virtue; and in this respect schoolboys are no more strong-minded than their fathers.

One part of Rodney's self-imposed task was made unexpectedly easy. Just as he ran out of the school gates he came right up against Hammersley, who was entering.

"Hollo!" remarked Hammersley, which is, being translated from the language of schoolboys, "I beg your pardon."

"I say, Hammersley, you are to get the prize ; I don't want it. You are to have it ; go and speak to Willoughby about it," ejaculated Rodney, all in a breath ; and was off before Hammersley had time to ask him what he meant.

When Rodney reached home, he paused for a minute at the door. His mother ! how should he explain it to her ? And he was right in anticipating that there would be some difficulty here ; for as soon as he entered the parlour he saw that his young brother had already brought the news.

"Hurrah ! hurrah !" shouted Nelson, jumping upon a chair and waving his cap. "Here's the fellow that's got the prize. 'See, the conquering hero comes !'"

"I'm so glad, Rodney !" cried his mother, welcoming him with one of her brightest smiles. "I scarcely hoped you would have got it."

"But I haven't," said Rodney.

"What ! Nelson said the names were read out in school."

"So they were. But Mr. Willoughby thinks it will be changed."

"Oh ! 't isn't fair !" cried Nelson.

"Yes, it is. I asked him to let Hammersley have it," said Rodney, plunging into his confession. "I could see they all thought he had deserved it, and so

he had. If it hadn't been for his illness, he would have been miles ahead of me, mother."

"Well—but—Rodney," began Mrs. Carrison, looking disappointed; for she, too, had been as proud and happy in his success as he had been.

"Don't, mother!" cried out Rodney. "Hold your tongue, Nelson, and never say another word about it. You will make me sorry that I did it, and—and I am not sure that I am glad.

With that Rodney bounced out of the parlour and went to his own little room, and lay down on the bed, and was not sure what to think of it. But presently the door opened, and his mother slipped in and kissed him, and he knew what she meant, and felt happier than if some enchanter had given him an ass loaded with prizes.


I may as well tell you the end of this matter. The masters decided that, under the circumstances, Carrison and Hammersley should be bracketed as equal; so that both of them got the first prize, if one may say such a thing.





CHAPTER V.

FRIDAY.

ODNEY was not wrong in supposing that a good deal of astonishment would be caused by his giving up the prize in Hammersley's favour. It was the talk of the whole form, and he had to go through the ordeal of hearing his conduct discussed from various points of view; but his blushing modesty had not to encounter so much praise as he had expected. More than one of the masters, indeed, spoke to him in warm approval of his conduct, and Mr. Dalton gave him a smile and a meaning look that were a great encouragement. Among the boys, however, he was mortified to find that his self-denial was looked upon rather suspiciously than otherwise. A few only seemed to believe in his generosity, and there were not wanting

some who did more than hint that he was not so disinterested as he might seem.

"I know all about it," said Sargent. "Hammersley's *mater* was at tea with Carrison's *mater* the other night——"

"No, she wasn't."

"And they agreed——"

"No, they didn't."

"They drew lots which of their darlings was to get the prize," said Lessing.

"There isn't a word of truth in it," cried Rodney. "I let Hammersley have the prize because I thought he deserved it."

"Oh, yes! very likely! I'll be bound you didn't give it up without making something by the bargain," sneered Sargent. "Nobody supposes you would have been so generous as to give it up for nothing."

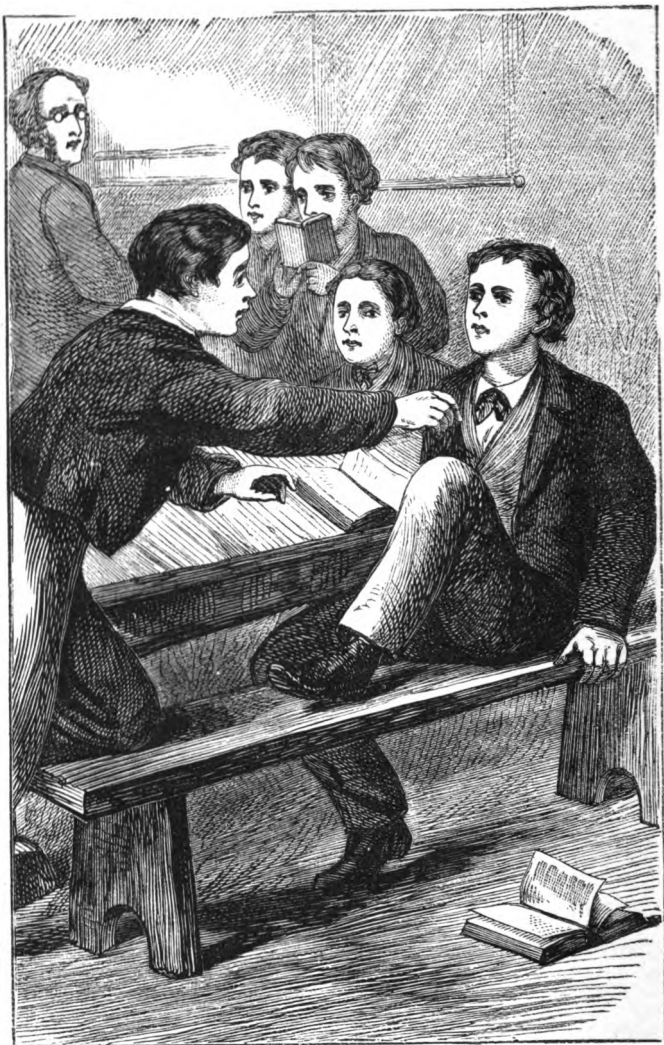
"Nobody supposes *you* would have been so generous, Sargent," said Lessing, coming to Rodney's rescue.

But though for the moment the laugh was turned in Rodney's favour, he felt deeply vexed, and stalked into school with his most injured air. These stupid fellows didn't understand him, he thought. They looked upon him as selfish, indeed! Little did they know what a generous soul he had, and how willing he was always to give up his own advantage. But

they should find out their mistake some day ! They should learn that he was not the sullen, ungenial character for which in their ignorance they took him ! They should be forced by his friendliness and forbearance to see him in his true colours, and to repent that they had ever thought ill of him !

All this was passing through Rodney's mind while his form was up to Mr. Willoughby, doing Greek Testament, and I fear his reflections kept him from attending to the lesson and getting so many marks as he would otherwise have done, a loss that can scarcely, however, be ascribed to self-denial on his part. When he went down to his desk he would fain have bethought him of what he should do to reveal himself to his schoolfellows in his proper character, but that he found himself under the necessity of writing some Latin verses. To this end he proceeded to look about for his Gradus, and not discovering it in his desk, he was presently aware that it was in the hands of Master Sargent, who sat a few places off Straightway Rodney forgot all his resolutions about heaping coals of fire on Sargent's head, and going up to him, said, as wrathfully as he could under the circumstances—for you will understand that the master was sitting close by, hearing another form,—

“ I say ! you are very cool to help yourself to my Gradus.”



RODNEY AND SARGENT—THE QUARREL.

"Is it yours?" said Sargent, carelessly. "I saw it lying about, and took it to look up one of these horrible words. Oh! I wish the man who invented Latin verses was somewhere about just now! Wouldn't I punch his head, that's all!"

"You should have looked and seen my name. Hand it here this moment!"

"Wait one minute; I have lost mine, and I only want to see this one word."

"I can't wait. Give it me!" exclaimed Rodney, trying to snatch away the book.

Sargent held it fast, Rodney pulled, a little scuffle arose, and the monotony of school was varied in a way not disagreeable for the other boys.

"Look out! *He'll* see you," counselled some friendly monitor, and Rodney was going to take this hint, but delayed, to make one more attempt to recover his property, which Sargent, whose blood was up, was equally determined to retain. That one moment was unlucky, for the master's eyes were raised just then, and he saw the squabble.

"Carrison! Sargent! I thought you knew how to behave yourselves in school. Really, I can't allow this kind of disorderly conduct. You will each have an hour's detention."

At this, of course, the combatants parted. Sargent let go the book, and Rodney walked back to his

desk, with his ill-humour very considerably increased.

It was a shame of Sargent to take his book, and try to keep it, and cause a squabble, and get him into a scrape. Rodney was not the sort of boy who generally was kept in detention, and the punishment was to him a severer one than it would have been to many of his schoolfellows ; so it is only on account of his recent good resolutions that we are to be surprised if, instead of doing his verses carefully, he felt too much annoyed to attend to anything but drawing a caricature of Sargent. The bull defends himself with his horns, we know ; the boar with his tusks ; and if Rodney was not a good hand at fighting or scolding, this was his weapon. He had a good deal of ill-nature, a certain amount of humour, and a little talent for drawing ; by the help of all which he succeeded in producing a not very flattering picture of Sargent, who was represented as a beggar in rags stealing a Gradus. Rodney was very much pleased with his handiwork, so were his neighbours on each side, and he was minded to let all the form see it.

“Don’t ! It is clever and amusing, and it will make the other fellows laugh, but it will make Sargent angry, and then there will be a regular quarrel between you, instead of a petty scrimmage,

which both of you will forget all about in half an hour if you leave the matter alone. Sargent meant no harm by borrowing your book, and if you had not been so hasty and cross about it, you would have had it back, and no harm would have been done. Then, remember your good resolutions."

So said, or ought to have said, conscience; and perhaps Rodney listened for a moment to such good advice, and felt inclined to throw his caricature into the fire, and try to forget his disagreement with Sargent; but his love of approbation was too strong to let him behave so sensibly. He passed the caricature up the form, and presently he had the satisfaction of seeing it arrive at Sargent, who uttered an angry exclamation and crumpled the paper up in his hand. He was about to throw it out of the window, but first turning to shake his fist at Rodney, he could not resist the temptation of flinging it at him. Rash Sargent, too angry to be cautious!

Mr. Willoughby saw him throw the ball of paper, and supposing that he was trying to distract the attention of the other boys from their work, he called him up and gave him a lecture and two hundred lines, neither of which tended to calm Sargent's wrath, you may be sure.

And when they got out into the playground for a short interval, didn't he pounce upon Rodney!

"What do you mean by getting me into a scrape?"

"What do you mean by getting *me* into a scrape?" replied Rodney.

"I didn't. I was going to give you your stupid book, but you wouldn't wait a minute. I never knew such a spiteful, quarrelsome, obstinate donkey as you are."

"I know one far worse," sneered Rodney.

"I'll give you a licking," roared Sargent, catching hold of him by the collar and shaking him.

Rodney's shirt gave way under this ferocious grasp, and a great tear was both heard and seen. To tell the truth, the shirt was well worn and often mended; for the Carrisons were not rich, and this made him the more angry. For it was his turn to be angry now.

"See what you have done! I declare you shall pay for it. You shall buy me a new one. It's an abominable shame," cried Rodney, louder and more wrathfully, as he heard all the boys laughing at his rage.

"It isn't my fault. Why do you wear such rotten old things? Won't you catch it from your mother when you go home! She always mends your things, you know."

"She doesn't," cried Rodney, springing at Sargent and aiming an ineffectual blow at him.

"Oh!" said Sargent, warding off the blow and putting himself in a fighting attitude, "if that's what you want, I'm ready. Here, Balbus, take my jacket, will you?"

"A fight! a fight! A fight between big Carrison and Sargent!" cried the small boys who were spectators of this scene. But close at hand were two of the sixth form, Leake and Ellis, who at once interfered. "Shut up," was the argument with which they advised peace, at the same time, however, taking up an attitude more calculated than a hundred arguments to prevent war. "What's all this about, Sargent? you are not a cub now. Let cubs delight to bark and bite, for 'tis *their* nature to, but big fellows in the head-master's forms should never fight, unless something very bad is the matter. Come, Carrison, what's exciting you?"

"Well, what business had he to say that my mother mended my old clothes?" cried Rodney.

"So she does, doesn't she?" retorted Sargent; "mine does, I know. And what business had you to draw that silly picture of me?"

"And what business had you to take my Gradus, I should like to know?"

"And what business had you——"

"There, there!" interposed Leake, pulling Sargent off, "that will do. You will both feel better

presently. In the meantime, you are presenting a very unedifying spectacle to all these cubs, who are staring open-mouthed to see two of their elders and betters in a passion."

Rodney could see the truth of this, but Leake was wrong in foretelling that he would feel better presently. His was not one of those hasty tempers that, like shallow lakes, are lashed by a sudden hurricane, and seem to be quieter and sweeter as soon as it has passed. A passion with him was rather like a storm at sea, which dies away gradually, and leaves a long heavy swell behind it. When Rodney began to grow calmer, it was only to feel utterly disgusted. First he was disgusted with Sargent, then with himself. And his disgust with himself first arose from the knowledge that he had been making a fool of himself, and would be well laughed at. Then, as he was able to think more coolly and honestly of what had happened, he saw that he acted not only foolishly but wrongly, and bitterly regretted that he had not prevented all this by a little self-control shown at the time when he first allowed his annoyance at Sargent to get the better of him.

He could not give way to these reflections till school was over, though they kept him from attending to his work as he ought to have done. But when

twelve o'clock came, and he had to stay in detention for an hour, he had plenty of time to think over his conduct; and of course the more he thought over it, the more he became disgusted with it. No one interrupted his meditations, for no talking was allowed in detention; but there was one monitor that the master could not keep out of the room, or prevent from whispering in Rodney's ear. And that monitor said,—

“ A pretty fellow you are, with your fine resolutions to be much more generous and kind than other people! Why, you are far more selfish than anybody you know; and if you have been trying to do unselfish actions, it is only because you were told that this is a more effectual way of making yourself happy. Who is this self, indeed? A paltry, greedy, ill-natured, spiteful, lazy, unfriendly fellow. Why should he be made happy, I should like to know? Now don't try to shake me off; I have you safe here. You can't walk off, or take up a book, or even whistle; you must listen this time to every word I have got to say to you, and you may as well listen with a good grace, and profit by what you hear. Allow me to remind you of all the examples of *kindness*, and *patience*, and *self-denial* which you have shown to-day. Why, the first thing you did when you got up in the morning was to feel cross because

that girl, Eliza, had forgotten to put water in your jug. Certainly she ought not to have done so ; but you might have fetched some water for yourself, and afterwards told her politely of the omission, instead of violently scolding and blaming the poor girl, who is so shy and new to her work, and yet so anxious not to give cause for complaint. Then didn't you torment Nelly because she hadn't your boots ready just when you wanted them ? and you know the reason was that you got them wet, and they had to be thoroughly dried first. And what about that dispute with Nelson ? He broke your flower-pot, did he ? Yes, by accident, and you made such a work about it, and told him he should pay you out of his little pocket-money, and made him feel far more unhappy than yourself ; for you know you don't particularly care about the flower-pot. You don't really mean to take his pocket-money ? No ; but you did mean it, and he thought you meant it ; at all events, you can't deny that you meant to wreak your vengeance on him for this heinous crime. And your mother, she begged you not to be so angry with Nelson, and you wouldn't listen to her, and made her unhappy ; you great, coarse, undutiful, ill-bred lout ! It is her fault, indeed ; she ought to have whipped you well, as other mothers do fractious babies ; but it is your fault if you don't try to amend your behaviour

towards her, now that you are growing up to be so old and, can I say, so sensible? I know plenty of other things that I could bring up against you. For instance, who took the largest and best piece of bacon at breakfast this morning? But we will say no more, for you must admit that you have just behaved in a most senseless and passionate way, and made an utter fool of yourself before all your school-fellows. Oh, you silly boy! No wonder you don't feel happy! Where is that paper that Mr. Dalton gave you? Crumpled and dirtied, at the bottom of your pocket!"

"I meant to do what Mr. Dalton told me," whispered Rodney, behind the lid of his desk. "I meant to be unselfish, and I tried my best;" and there he stopped, for he could not tell lies to his conscience this time.

"You meant and you tried: yes! Many of us mean, and even try, to do right, and our meanings and tryings are found very weak unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless we know how weak they are, and know how our weakness may be made strong."

And thus Rodney learned a lesson that others had often tried to teach him—a lesson that is too seldom learned by schoolboys, though it is taught and preached in the ears of all; for it is a lesson which

can only be learned by those who set themselves to do God's will, and find how hard a task it is for man. And only those who learn this lesson can learn how to perform that task, which ought to be the work of our lives.

"I will try again," promised Rodney, behind the lid of his desk, and perhaps he sought help in the way that he had been taught as a child. "You shall soon not be able to reproach me," he declared to his conscience.

"What, already?" cried conscience, starting up.

"Do you mean that I am too confident? Well, at all events I shall be almost sure not to make such a fool of myself as I have been doing to-day."

"I hope not," said conscience, gravely. "But listen: if you wish not to repeat such folly, the best thing you can do is to make up for it as far as you can."

"How?"

"Go to Mr. Willoughby, tell him that you provoked Sargent, and ask him to let you do half of his imposition."

"So I will. I dare say Willoughby will let us off altogether when he sees me behaving so—*no! no! no!* I won't allow myself to think such things. Don't let me, conscience!"

Such were Rodney's meditations in detention.

We see traces of his weakness and vanity even in his penitence. Yet we must admit it would be well if all naughty schoolboys while under punishment allowed their thoughts to take so profitable a direction. Let no one sneer at him who tries to wrestle with sin, and has one fall and another, till at length, if he strive faithfully and patiently, it is granted him to prevail. Rather laugh at the cowards who never draw the sword and are never wounded in the fight.





CHAPTER VI.

SATURDAY.—CONCLUSION.

HARD! yes, I know it is hard," said Mr. Dalton.

It was Saturday afternoon. Poets have told of a holy Sabbath charm which seems to spread over all things on the first day of the week ; even thus, I believe, in the eyes of a schoolboy does the last day of the week seem brighter and better than do the Thursdays and Fridays of dull, toilsome writing, reading, and arithmetic. Released from these tyrants, and safe from their terrors till Monday, he makes friends with Nature, and perceives on her joyous face smiles which he passed unnoticed as he crept unwillingly to school. For him the sun seems to shine more gloriously, the birds to sing more cheerily, the brooks to run more clearly, and the flowers to

bloom more sweetly. But it is all an hallucination ; sober age grows reluctantly to confess that there is no more beauty and sweetness about a Saturday afternoon than about the blackest Monday that ever dawned in tears, and was remembered to be the last day of the holidays. Nature knows no lessons and no playtime ; and the only difference really observable in her arrangements on a Saturday afternoon is, perhaps, that the blackberries seem all to have been picked before, and that wary old crows are more cautious than usual about coming within reach of shot or stone, seeming aware that on this day the fields are not resorted to by nursery-maids alone, and lovers and sedate old people, and other harmless members of the human race.

It was Saturday afternoon, and Mr. Dalton and Rodney were walking through the meadows, sweet with cowslips and wild roses, and pleasant with hawthorn shade. We may guess what they were talking about.

“Hard ! yes, I know it is hard. My dear boy, everything in this world which is worth doing is hard to do. Nothing is to be had by men without labour ; —yes, Rodney, you may smile and think of the copy-book which I am quoting from, but these copy-book sayings are generally true, only too true, as some of us find to our cost when we make bold to neglect

them. Nothing for nothing is the rule of life ; even God's grace, which in one sense is free to all, must be striven for with all our strength. But to those who strive, to those who lift up feeble hands against their own sin, help will never be wanting, and they will never regret the struggles which have enabled them to be masters of themselves."

"I should like to tell you, sir," said Rodney, when they had walked on a few paces—"I should like to tell you what is the great difficulty with me. I tried to do as you advised me, and I felt that I was much happier for it—I am sure I shall be obliged to you all my life for teaching it to me ; but as soon as I had done something which I thought right, I began to feel proud about it, and to think—to think——"

"I understand. To think you were a very fine fellow, and that you could do good actions without much trouble ; and while you were reposing in this confidence, you found that your virtue was not so trustworthy as you thought ?"

"Yes, Mr. Dalton. I found that I was doing wrong, while I was——I can't explain what I mean, but you know, sir."

"An old, old story, Rodney. A story known to Him who bids us watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation. Do not think that this is any special

difficulty of yours. More or less, every person who tries to do, not what he would, but what he should, finds and falls into the same temptation. To be on one's guard against the danger is the first step towards escaping it. It is no cause for sorrow that you have begun to learn this; rather be glad if you can learn it so soon and so easily, and not as many do, who only come to know their own weakness after years of sinning, and sorrowing, and struggling, and even then perhaps find that they have known it too late."

"Yes!" broke out Mr. Dalton again, when they had walked on a few paces, "we should be thankful to God for *all* His mercies. You may have in your heart complained that He has given to you a disposition to melancholy, but even for that you can thank Him if you see that it has been the means of leading you to search for the secret of true happiness. The light, thoughtless spirits more natural to boys are often dangerous; when they evaporate, their possessor knows no way of enjoying life except in sinful pleasures; the very exuberance of youthful strength has blinded his eyes and prevented him from tasting and seeing what is really good upon earth. Rodney, I am not going to preach to you all day, but let me tell you, my boy, what I *know* to be true, that the holiest life is the safest, and happiest, and

best ; for no evil can happen to those who set themselves to do God's will in all things and to see His will in all things. Write that down in your heart, Rodney, and try never to forget it."

"I will, sir," said Rodney, looking up ; and he seemed as if he were trying to say something more and couldn't.

They walked on in silence till they reached the end of the fields and passed into one of the lowest quarters of the town. Rodney wondered why Mr. Dalton came here, but he did not like to ask any questions. A much duller boy could not fail to notice the contrast between the open fields, grateful with green and sunshine, which they had just quitted and these narrow, dark, dirty streets, where foul odours, and foul rags, and foul words, greeted the senses at every turn. Here a white-faced child stared at such well-fed, well-dressed strangers as at beings of another sphere ; there a wretched-looking woman, huddled on her door-step, cast after them a scowl that told of misery as well as hate. One minute they had to step across the road to avoid contact with a drunkard, scarcely able, even at that time of the day, to stagger to his own door ; the next a group of quarrelling women made them turn aside. Rodney was more accustomed to the quiet and venerable gentility of the Minster yard than to

scenes like this, and he drew a breath of relief when they left these back streets and gained a wider thoroughfare.

"How unhappy these people must be!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said Mr. Dalton, bitterly, "they are unhappy. There you see the sisters, Sin and Sorrow, in all their ugliness. God made man to be pure and healthy, like the fields through which we have passed; this is what man has done for himself. Pity them, Rodney, and pray that some day you may be able to relieve their misery. I had a reason for bringing you through these places, and now I want you to accompany me somewhere else."

"Are you going in here?" said Rodney, in some surprise; for they had stopped before the gate of the County Hospital.

"Why not? There is nothing to be afraid of."

Rodney said no more, and followed Mr. Dalton into the hospital, though not without some misgivings; for he had always conceived of an hospital as an abode of horrors, and, boy-like, he shrank from scenes appealing to his emotions. But his worst fears were not realized; nothing very horrible met his eyes or ears on entering. In the courtyard there were several patients in various stages of recovery, who were lounging or hobbling about, and

chatting to each other, and smoking their pipes, and looking not so very miserable, though most of them were thin and pale, as invalids must expect to be. Passing through this court the visitors were conducted through long stone passages to the ward which Mr. Dalton asked for. Nothing like a saw or an amputating-table was to be seen there; only a lofty, airy room, with rows of white beds down each side, and brightly coloured pictures on the whitewashed walls. Everything was scrupulously clean and neat; everybody was quiet, from the nurse who moved from bed to bed down to the fat grey cat which sat in a sunny corner, and blinked in a comfortable manner that showed he was quite at home. That cat reassured Rodney; he took courage to look about and notice what was in the room as well as his short-sighted vision would allow him. He saw the eyes of some of the sufferers turned towards him from the patient pillows, and others reclining with their pale faces propped up in bed; while others, again, were able to sit at the open window, where the sweet June air breathed into the room like love and hope, and a gay geranium bloomed as brightly as if it were born and bred in a palace. One or two other visitors were already in the room; a little child was climbing about her sick father's bed, and asking when he would come home.

"Next week, darling," said the weak voice ; but the nurse, seeing Rodney interested in this man, whispered to him that the poor fellow would never leave the house alive.

And Rodney, the selfish, the sullen, the moping, felt the blessed tears rise into his eyes, and all unconsciously breathed a prayer as he turned away his head and looked out of the open window. For the first time he was struck by the contrast between the misery of man's life and the glories of the earth. There was no thought of his own little troubles ; all that for the time was washed away in pity for those afflicted ones around him, to whom the sunshine and the daisies, and freedom and mirth, seemed denied by misfortunes such as he had scarcely ever dreamed of.

Mr. Dalton kept Rodney only a few minutes here. During this time, he was talking in a low tone with a man who lay in a bed at the farthest end of the room, and seemed to be suffering more than any of the other patients, if one might judge from a faint groan that every now and then escaped from his lips, and the solicitude with which he was tended by the nurse, who kept moistening his lips every few minutes. As they came away, Mr. Dalton told Rodney about this man ; how he had a large family almost unprovided for ; how his cure would be at

the best a matter of many weeks; how the doctors scarcely hoped that he could ever completely recover his strength. Mr. Dalton had been able to comfort him a little by the news that one of his sons had been engaged in a warehouse at a small salary, and another received as a free pupil in a charity school, and other friends were trying their best to take the care of one or two more off their mother's hands. Rodney almost shuddered. Would there ever come a time when he would look upon it as a favour to be taken from home?

They left the hospital and walked on towards the Minster Green without speaking much. Rodney was thinking of what he had just seen. At length he said, more for the sake of something to say than for any other reason, "Do you often go to the hospital Mr. Dalton?"

"Pretty often. I am one of the visitors, and the patients seem generally glad to see any one."

"I should have thought you had very little time for anything except the school work, sir."

"Oh, one can always find time to do a kind action, and one is never the worse for it: you see, Rodney, I have proved the value of my prescription by experience."

"So have I, sir."

"But you don't believe in it yet so strongly as I

do. I should like to get a hold of all the unhappy people in the world, and give them three great rules for driving away all their discontented feelings. The first is to have plenty to do, and then one has less temptation to give way to unpleasant thoughts. If such thoughts will come, the second rule is to set them to rights by thinking how many people there are in the world who are more unhappy than ourselves. If we still fret over our real or imagined troubles, the best thing is to drive them away by doing something to help or please others. If it were only for your own comfort and peace of mind, I should advise you never to forget my prescription."

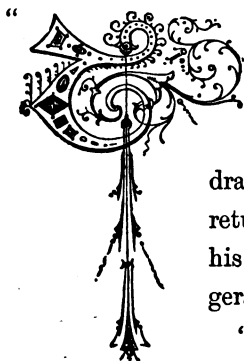
"I won't, sir," said Rodney.



THE WOLF AND THE MULE.



THE WOLF AND THE MULE.



HAT Sargent is a great, big, horrid brute !”

With this, little Frank Fitzgerald burst into the drawing-room one afternoon on his return from school, and flung down his books on the sofa. Mrs. Fitzgerald looked up from her work.

“Frank, Frank, do be quiet ; your sister has a headache, and you know I never like you to speak to me in that way.”

“But I can’t help it. He is such a——”

“You must not talk to me, Frank, while you are in a passion. Go into the garden, and run round it twenty times ; then climb up the elm-tree, and sit

there for half-an-hour to cool yourself. Afterwards,—perhaps, you will be fit to speak to me.”

Frank could not help smiling at his mother’s plan for driving away bad temper.

“Well, mamma, I will try not to be angry. Now I may speak to you, mayn’t I?”

“Let us hear all about it. What has Sargent been doing to put you in such a passion?”

“He is always doing something to me. I should get on very well at school if it weren’t for him. He tries to bully me whenever he gets a chance; and now that the Sargents have come to live next door, I shall have no peace, I know I shan’t! He has got a regular spite against me. When I was coming in just now, he ran after me and pulled all my books out of the strap and threw them into the gutter. See how he has spoiled my new grammar! I hate that Sargent,” declared Frank, his wrath rising afresh as he surveyed the injury done to his book. “If he had been at school a little longer, he might not have been so fond of his grammar.”

“Frank!”

“Well, mamma, you don’t know what a bully he is! I can’t help wanting to hate him. At least, I wish he hadn’t come to live next door.”

“My dear boy, it is very wrong of you to cherish such feelings. You must try not to hate any one.”

"It's of no use ; I can't help hating Sargent."

Mrs. Fitzgerald went on with her work, while Frank thumped the sofa-cushion as if to punish it for Sargent's misdoings. Then she said, in a low voice—

"Frank, you know about One who was treated with a cruelty which you cannot even imagine to yourself. You know how He came on earth to do good, and to teach us to do good ; and how men mocked Him, and tortured Him, and put Him to death. But in His bitterest agony He did not say, 'I can't help hating them,' or 'It is too hard,' but He prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' "

Frank got up and walked to the window, and stood there for a minute, tugging desperately at the cord of the blind. Then he said—

"I know it is wrong, mamma. I will try not to hate him."

"Ah ! Frankie, try to love him. Try if you can't overcome his evil with good on your part. Surely you have given him no reason to dislike you ; and if he finds you doing him nothing but kindnesses, he will become your friend instead of your enemy."

"But I can't do him any kindness. He is bigger than I am ; and I believe the real reason he has a spite against me, is because I am always above him in our form."

Mrs. Fitzgerald could scarcely help smiling at her son's notion, that he could do no kindness to a bigger boy.

"All I say is, *try*; you know better than I do what opportunities you have of showing Sargent that you wish to be friendly with him; and he must be a very bad boy indeed if he still dislikes you, when the ill-feeling is on one side only. At all events, you must confess that it will do you no good to hate him, seeing that he is bigger than you."

"No—but—I wish—I wish I could pay him out—no, I don't—yes, I do—but—but——"

"But you will try to pay him in another coin, Frank;" and then these two people kissed each other, though three weeks before, when Frank went to school, it had been solemnly stipulated between them that kissing should cease. Never mind, there was no one to see.

Mrs. Fitzgerald had been watching her son's experience at school rather closely, and was more concerned about his troubles than she cared to show. She was not one of those mothers who think it necessary to be always cackling after their darlings, and spreading their wings over them as soon as a bird of prey appears in sight. As a rule, she did not encourage her boy to come to her with tales out of school, but rather to make light of the rubs he



DESCENDING TO ANNOY.

would meet with there, and to trouble himself only about doing right, thinking that it was best for him to learn to fight his own battles, if possible, and, above all, to fight them with the noblest weapons. It was lucky for Frank that he had such a good and sensible mother, for his father was away in India, and there was some chance that he might be spoiled, as only sons with a fine, high temper of their own are apt to be at a woman's apron-string ; and it was lucky for Mrs. Fitzgerald that she had such an affectionate son, who gave her so little pain. Frank was not one of those boys into whom good advice has to be beaten and scolded. He was not ashamed of doing his best to please and obey his mother ; and in this matter he knew she was right, so he made up his mind that he would try to treat Sargent in the spirit she had recommended to him.

But he soon found that it was not very easy to keep this resolution. The very next morning, when he was ready to start for school, he peeped out to see if Sargent was waiting to give him the pleasure of his company, as he often did ; and, finding the coast apparently clear, he was going to make a run for it. But he had not got out of the gate before he heard a voice which seemed to come from above his head.

“ Hallo ! Fitzgerald, what are you in such a hurry

about! Hold hard a minute, and we will go together."

Frank looked up, and saw his tormentor perched in a mulberry-tree in the Sargents' garden, where he was taking a slight repast to prepare himself for the labours of the day, and from which he now began to descend with greater alacrity than he would have shown if it was only going to lessons that was in question. Master Sargent—otherwise called "Nosey," for a reason which you would understand if you saw his picture—was a big, long-legged creature, and Frank was afraid he could not run away from him; besides, he wished to be conciliatory, so he stopped, though he had more than a suspicion that his new neighbour only wanted to torment him. And, indeed, this was the case, for Sargent no sooner came up than he saluted Frank by squashing a soft mulberry on his shirt-front; after which he snatched off his cap and ran away with it, Frank following and trying to get it back. Sargent only laughed and kept tantalizing Frank by pretending to give him his cap, and then pulling it away again, till at length, growing tired of this form of amusement, he hung it up on a high railing, and went on his way peacefully.

"I'm not going to be angry," said Frank to himself, as he climbed the railing and got his cap.

"I'm not—but I do wish that—that Sargent would leave me alone."

He then began to hurry on as fast as he could, for he saw no other boys on the road, and was afraid he must be late. But he had not gone very far before Sargent pounced upon him from behind a corner.

"Oh, here you are again!" he cried, pulling Frank's ears till he called out, "Oh, please, don't, Sargent! you're hurting me."

"Glad to hear it," said Sargent. "It's good for small boys."

"You know you wouldn't go on that way to a fellow of your own size!" cried Frank, indignantly.

"Of course I wouldn't, because no fellow of my own size is such a donkey as you are. You are a regular little mule; you must carry my books for me; you are fit for nothing but to be a baggage-mule, you know. Take my books, mule."

"Oh, I wish he hadn't come to live next door!" thought Frank, but he said nothing, and took Sargent's books. If it had been his brains, the weight would have been considerably lighter.

"Now go behind me; mules always follow their masters."

There was no help for it, so Frank obeyed in silence, and followed Sargent as that amiable young

gentleman went on before in triumph, greatly rejoiced at the idea that he was worrying somebody.

Mrs. Fitzgerald and Frank were wrong in speaking of Sargent as if he had any particular spite against the small boy. It was merely that he was of a somewhat *hybridistical* disposition—there's a long word for you to find out the meaning of!—with a great delight in causing pain to others, and never saw a creature weaker than himself without being moved to exercise his ill-conditioned talents upon it. He no more disliked Frank than the snake dislikes the rabbit, or the wolf the lamb. Such animals abound in the world; nature has ordained them to be a trial to more helpless beings—and, let us hope, to be caught at it occasionally, and soundly served with a double allowance of their own sauce.

This morning Sargent had managed to delay both himself and Frank so long on their road to school that they arrived just in time to be too late, and found the door of the great schoolroom, where prayers were going on, shut against them. Frank was very much disgusted. He had never been late before, and not only did he not like the notion of the usual punishment—fifty lines to write—but Sargent informed him that he should have to do his share also. "For, you know," said he, with as much reason as the wolf in the fable, "it was you who kept us."

Frank knew it was no use arguing, so he said nothing ; and then Sargent, who could not feel satisfied unless he saw his victim showing signs of annoyance, asked him why he didn't say something.

"Because I haven't anything to say," replied Frank, sitting down on the steps and trying to look over his lessons.

"Then I'll give you something to say ;" and Sargent began amiably to twist Frank's arm and to thump him on it, a species of torture in which the gentleman especially delighted.

Frank's little heart swelled within him and the tears came into his eyes, but he bit his lips and wouldn't cry out ; and soon Sargent left off, either because he was pleased by Frank's fortitude or because he was not brute enough to go on longer, or because a new idea came into his head. He suddenly remembered that he was not sure if he knew his gender rules, and ordered Frank to take the book and hear him.

Frank was only too glad to do so ; but it was very soon evident that Sargent, as was the nature of the animal, did not know his lesson. This did not please him, and he was about to wreak his dissatisfaction on his small teacher, when, luckily for Frank, the schoolroom door opened and the boys came pouring down to their separate class-rooms. It will be

understood that bullies sometimes find it advisable not to exercise their art in public, so Sargent contented himself for the present with giving Frank a rap over the head with his book, and walked off.

In a few minutes more, the boys were all in their places, and work had begun. Sargent was in the same form with Frank, for this great hulking fellow was very low down in the school; but now he hoped to be safe from his persecutor, whom their master called "the leopard," because he "did not change his spots," but remained nearly always at the bottom whereas Frank kept a good place, and was bidding fair to be head of the form as soon as he should have got a little more accustomed to school ways. But alas! life is uncertain. These boys were being examined in their gender rules, and Frank was asked how many feminine nouns there were ending in *or*, and could not for the life of him remember at the moment, and the question was passed down the form, and, for a wonder, nobody could answer it but Sargent, who had managed just before the lesson began to get two lines, and only two, into his head :

"A feminine is *arbor* (tree) :
A second you will hardly see."

So up went lucky Sargent, to the great disgust of

Frank, who knew that he would have no peace so long as he had such a neighbour. And he was right ; for Sargent at once proceeded with great gusto to “ play ” with Frank, pinching or poking him whenever the master’s eye was off them, pulling his hair, making smudges on his book with a pencil, or using any other means of annoyance which his inventive genius might suggest.

This, of course, was enough to distract any one’s attention, and Frank could not attend to a word of the lesson, sitting on thorns all the time, and being troubled to know what Sargent was going to do next. It was no use to beg Sargent to leave him alone ; he was only too delighted to see that his labours were not in vain, and Frank could not get away from his tormentor, for he was so put out that every word of the lesson, which he thought he had known perfectly, seemed to have slipped out of his head, and he lost chance after chance of getting up. Then the master, who suspected that Sargent owed his elevation to a random shot, put him on at the most formidable of the rules—that one so dear to all schoolboys who have been forced to learn it without mistake, as I was—

“ Many nouns that end in *is*,
Are *masculini generis* ;
Panis, piscis, crinis, finis,
Ignis, lapis, pulvis, cinis,” &c.

women, even though they don't know Latin grammar, are not all so stupid as some would say they are. This had stuck to Frank's mind as fast as a burr; and now, when nobody could answer, he rose in triumph, and shot up to the top of the form like a balloon shooting upwards when the ropes are cut, while Sargent looked after him with similar feelings to those with which a hungry shark might regard a plump middy securely perched on the top of the mainmast.

After the beautiful similes contained in the last paragraph, it is only fitting that we should treat ourselves to a fine metaphor. The wheels of the chariot of Minerva, goddess of wisdom, went creaking on over the ruts of the schoolboy mind till eleven o'clock, when the books were shut, places were marked, caps were snatched, and our friends of Mr. Williamson's form went whooping and trooping out for half-an-hour's play. Frank, who had by this time forgotten his troubles, was looking out for a safe place to put his books in before joining a game of "Chevy Chase," when he was aware of Sargent tearing after him in haste and wrath.

"Stop, stop, you ass of a mule!" he cried. "You have stolen my grammar—you have stolen my grammar, you thief! Give it back directly."

"I have not stolen your grammar."

"Don't tell lies, mule! There it is in your hand."

Frank opened one of the books which he was carrying, and which he had thought were all his own, and sure enough, on the fly-leaf, there was the following effusion :—

"Black is the raven,
Black is the rook ;
But not so black as the wicked boy
Who steals this book.
" (Signed) SARGENT, Esq."

"Do you see that? Do you believe that it is mine now, you lying, stealing, stupid, silly baggage-mule?"

"Well, I didn't mean to take it!" protested Frank. "I thought it was my own; and if I have yours, you must have mine."

"I wouldn't keep the dirty thing," said Sargent, taking Frank's grammar out of his pocket and kicking it several yards away. "Now, give me mine and never dare to steal my books again."

"I'm sure, Sargent, you know very well that it was only a mistake. I daresay you have often taken other fellows' books yourself by mistake," cried Frank, the Irish blood of the Fitzgeralds beginning to boil at such an accusation.

"Don't tell any more stories, mule," said Sargent, who, of course, knew very well that it was a mis-

take, but could not let slip such a good chance of worrying poor Frank; "you are a thief, sir, and deserve to be kicked round the playground. Take that!"

That was a good cuff, which brought tears into Frank's eyes, and made him forget all his resolutions not to be angry, and forget, too, how much bigger Sargent was; for he clenched his small fists in a most unlamblike manner, and for a moment seemed about to engage in unequal combat. But aid was at hand. From afar off, good-natured Harry Bryant, another neighbour of the Fitzgeralds, saw what was going on, and sprang to the spot, crying out to Sargent—

"Will you just leave Fitzgerald alone? You are always bullying him. I have a good mind to give you a good licking."

When the lion arrives upon the scene, the wolf puts his tail between his legs and slinks off, and that is just what Sargent did upon the present occasion; for it was only when lambs were concerned that he felt inclined to display his valour. And then Frank remembered that he was not to be angry, and found it easy enough to forget his troubles in a hearty game.

While this game was going on, up comes Sargent, this time with the most friendly and amiable air he

could put on, for he had a favour to ask ; and in such a case the wolf is careful to assume sheep's clothing.

“ Will any of you fellows lend me a fives' ball ? ”

“ Oh, get along, Sargent, and don't bother ! ” cried one.

“ You know you lost mine last week, so you needn't ask me,” said another.

Sargent did not seem likely to be obliged, for he was not a favourite with fellows of his own standing in the school ; and he was turning away disappointed, when Frank Fitzgerald, whom he had not thought it worth while to ask, called out—

“ Here, Sargent, I haven't got a fives' ball, but you can have my india-rubber one, only take care not to lose it.”

Sargent looked a little surprised, but he took the ball, with a sulky “ thank you,” and went off to the fives' court, while Frank continued his game, and did not enjoy it a bit the less for having overcome the feeling which had at first prompted him not to do a kindness to Sargent.

But games, like other things, must come to an end, and presently the bell began to ring, calling the boys into school again. Oh, that bell ! If Edgar Allan Poe had been at our school, I am sure he would have added a verse to his poem on “ The Bells.”

“Hear the summons of the bell,

Horrid bell!

As it rises o’er the din,

With its cruel call, ‘All in!’

Of our mad and merry games it sounds the knell,

And what weary hours of study doth its spiteful tongue foretell!

How it snaps out its ding dong:

Play is short and work is long;

Come along, come along;

We are waiting to begin;

Time is up before you think it,

So all in!

Oh, that heartless bell! sure, to hate it can’t be wrong.

Nor a sin

Would it be to sink it

At the bottom of the bay,

Where its cruel tongue might rust,

Calling us no more away

From our play;

But it rings, and it dings, and we must

Just obey!”

So in the boys went, more slowly than they had come out, yet not daring to linger long, for they were going to do arithmetic with Mr. Vialls, who was not to be trifled with. And as they were crowding into his room, Sargent gave Frank back his ball without saying anything; but as he did not pull his ears or thump him on the back, which were his usual modes of salutation, Frank felt that he had advanced in his tormentor’s good graces.

And soon he had another chance of “paying

Sargent out" for his bad behaviour. Just as Sargent was about to sit down to do his sums, he made the appalling discovery that he had not a slate pencil. Now, the want of a slate pencil was, in Mr. Vialls' eyes, a crime of the deepest dye; and Sargent, being already far in the master's black books, was troubled by gloomy forebodings, and began to rush wildly about begging of every one the loan of this humble but useful implement. But nobody seemed to have a slate pencil to spare, or, at least, nobody would lend one to Sargent. Nobody but Frank, who, when he heard what was wanted, snapped his own pencil in two and gave Sargent half of it.

The wolf accepted it, as his need was urgent; but perhaps he had the grace to feel that he would rather receive favours at the hands of any one than the boy to whom he had been behaving so ill-naturedly. Perhaps not: it is astonishing how thick the moral skin of some people is.

For an hour the slate pencils went rattle, rattle, while Mr. Vialls, from the watch-tower of his desk, surveyed the scene with eagle eye, and brought down wrath and swift vengeance upon the head of any luckless offender who might be discovered doing anything but his sums. An hour's smart work, and both boys and master were glad to find it over, and to get out into the fresh air again.

It was a chilly autumn day, and there was an hour to spare before dinner, so what more natural than that some of our young friends should stay in the playground to indulge in a game of hockey. Frank plunged into this with great zeal, for, though he may seem to show a want of spirit in trying to propitiate his persecutor, it is not to be supposed that he was of a mild nature, or did not delight in all pursuits which brought a chance of knocks and troubles. So presently he was to be seen in the very middle of a furious knot of boys, so closely wedged together that they could scarcely raise their arms as they struggled for the ball, which might all the while have been chuckling to see, if balls could see and chuckle, that they hit each other a great deal oftener than they touched it. Shouts, blows, wrestlings, pushings, tumblings; the *melée* was waxing thicker and hotter every moment, when such a howl arose from the midst of the crowd that both sides ceased their attempts, and everybody stopped to see what had happened. Then our friend Sargent was discovered lying on the ground and blubbering like a bull calf.

“Hallo! what’s the row?”

“Oh, I don’t know! oh dear! I believe my leg is broken, and my face is all cut.”

“Fiddlesticks!” cried one fellow. “I gave you one over the shins just now, and some one has shoved



FRANK SAYING SARGENT OUT.

his arm into your face and made your nose bleed. That's all."

"I can tell you, my leg is——"

"Bother! What's all this fuss about nothing. Where's the ball? Come on!"

The game, that for a space did fail, was now resumed with fresh ardour, for Sargent was well known as making a great work about nothing, and nobody paid any attention to his complaints, but left him to pick himself up and limp away, loudly bemoaning his miseries. But in a minute Frank's good-natured little heart reproached him for leaving his enemy in such a plight, and, handing his hockey-stick to a fellow who was looking on, he ran after Sargent, crying, "Can't you walk? Lean on me, if you like, and I'll help you in."

Sargent did not refuse this offer, and he was assisted to the porter's lodge, where a basin of cold water was procured, and he was set to rights as far as possible. His shin was bruised and bleeding from a cut with a stick; Frank helped him to tie it up with a handkerchief, and that was all that could be done for him. Sargent still went on complaining as ruefully as if he had been half-killed, but he was not ungrateful to Frank, and, by way of thanking him, he said very seriously, "Have you ever seen my snake? You shall see it this afternoon, if you like."

Frank thanked him for this mark of condescension, and ran out to resume his game. But there was to be no more hockey for him that morning. A drizzling rain, so small that the boys took no notice of it, had been falling for ten minutes or so, and now it was quickly changing into a heavy pour, which looked as if it had made up its mind to stop for dinner and spend the evening. So the boys left off, turned up the collars of their jackets, and began to think of getting home with as dry skins as possible.

And now Frank found himself in luck ; for there were his mother and sister driving past in their pony carriage, and he had only to hail them and be taken up. There would be still a vacant place, and something came into Frank's head. He looked round and saw Sargent crouching under the porch, and ruefully watching the swollen gutter. Not that the Whitminster boys, in general, were afraid of a wetting, but he was just recovering from a bad cold, and had no fancy for being laid up again.

"Here's a chance for paying off Sargent," said Frank to himself, and whispered something to his mother.

"By all means," she replied, smiling at him meaningly; and Frank ran back and called out to his schoolfellow. "Come along, Sargent, lots of room ! Get up !".

Sargent held back, but the rain was coming down faster than ever, so he hesitated no longer, but jumped in beside Frank, and away went the impatient pony, and in two or three minutes landed them safely at home, not quite dry, but not very wet.

During this time Sargent sat silent, and no doubt was thinking to himself that this mule was very obstinate in paying him back good for evil. Then, perhaps the wolf had the grace to be ashamed of himself. At all events, before going in, he sheepishly thanked Mrs. Fitzgerald, and drew Frank under the shade of the mulberry-tree for a little conversation.

"I say," he was pleased to remark, "do you know you are not a bad mule?"

"Am I not?" said Frank, laughing.

"No, indeed. Look here; when I said you were to write my lines to-night, of course I was only teasing, you know."

"All right."

"Come in and see my snake some day, will you? And I say, look here, you know, if any of the fellows bully you, just you tell me, and I'll talk to 'em," said the wolf, looking very bold and virtuous.

"Very well; but I must go to dinner," said Frank, and ran away to have a laugh inside.

DARK AND LIGHT BLUE.



DARK AND LIGHT BLUE.

CHAPTER I.

WAITING FOR THE NEWS.



HOPE Oxford will win."

"No! I hope Cambridge will win."

The speakers were not athletic young men in boating costume, but, if you please, two girls, who were tripping across Whitminster Green on their way to Miss Spencer's school. Maria Fitzgerald, who had spoken first, was a tall dignified damsel, with dark hair and eyes. She was evidently not bad-looking, and almost as evidently was quite aware of the fact. The same description could not be given of her companion, Lotty Bryant; when it is speci-

fied that she had a round, roguish, good-natured face, and enough yellow hair to stuff a mattress with, as her impudent brothers used to tell her, there is little more to be said in praise of her personal appearance. To tell the truth, she was decidedly *dumpy*, and though I never could bring myself to declare that a lady had a snub nose, I may use the simile which Mr. Tennyson has lately put into the hands of us faithful delineators of human nature, and hint to the reader that one of Lotty's most prominent features was "tiptilted like the petal of a flower." What of that? The best people are not always the best looking; and both our friends were not bad girls in their way, though each had her faults, as we shall see presently."

"Oxford is sure to win," said Maria. "My father was there, and I'm always for Oxford."

"Well, I am sure that my great grandmother's first cousin must have been at Cambridge, so Cambridge must win," laughed Lotty. "Besides, light blue is so much prettier than dark."

"It doesn't suit me," said Maria, feeling to see that her hat was right upon her head.

"And you have had your new hat trimmed with dark blue! Oh, how I shall laugh at you if Oxford doesn't win after all."

"No chance of that," said Maria.

"We shall see! we shall see!" sung Lotty, skipping away through the school door, which by this time the two girls had reached, and found several of their schoolfellows engaged in discussing the same subject as was first in their thoughts.

It was the day of the University boat-race, which was being rowed unusually late that year. All over England people were wondering what the result would be, and even Whitminster was quite excited over the contest, as far as such a genteel, not to say sleepy place, could be excited. And the young ladies at Miss Spencer's establishment, who might be supposed to have nothing to do with boat-racing, were not a whit behind the rest of the community in their enthusiasm; for had they not brothers, cousins, and other relations interested on one side or the other? Indeed, the Dean's son was pulling for Oxford, and Henderson, who had been head boy of the Whitminster Grammar School, for Cambridge; and the favour in which these two young men were held among the girls would alone have been enough to stir them up to eager partisanship on one side or other. So that morning there was not much work done at Miss Spencer's, for we know how girls can only give their minds to one thing at a time. Sums came out with the most amazing results; false notes

were played till Mr. Burr ridge, music-master and organist at the Minster, almost wished his pupils were little choir-boys whose ears he might box; and French exercises had so many mistakes in them that Mademoiselle Poireau, the Parisienne governess, was driven to exclaim—

“ Ah, mesdemoiselles, I see well how this race of boats has turned you the head! The young ladies of Paris do not let themselves be enraged by such *bétise grossière*. No! The poetry—yes; the fashion—yes; the costumes—yes; but the fights of strength between vulgar sailors—non, non, non! Ah, how these English misses want ton!” the good lady muttered to herself in her own language.

Then Miss Spencer herself appeared upon the scene, stern, awful, threatening. “ Young ladies, the Dean has been kind enough to request me to give you a holiday this afternoon if Oxford should be victorious in this struggle which is so strangely engrossing your minds. Other friends of yours have asked the same favour for you if the result should be otherwise. I cannot say that I altogether approve of your being mixed up with such matters, but I do not wish to disoblige your friends.”

“ Oh, thank you, Miss Spencer!” cried Lotty, bouncing up from her seat, and hastily shutting up her exercise-book with ink still wet.

"Silence, and resume your seat," said Miss Spencer, severely. "I was going on to say, that if you do not pay more attention to your studies between this time and half-past twelve o'clock, so far from granting you any relaxation, I shall feel compelled to impose some additional tasks upon you."

This sobered the young ladies, and they stopped whispering and fidgeting, and till half-past twelve looked, at least, more studious. But they were unusually glad when half-past twelve came, and Miss Spencer made them a long speech, in which she informed them, first, that they did not deserve a half holiday; secondly, that she was going to give them one; thirdly,—but nobody listened to what came afterwards, so the part of her speech which Miss Spencer intended to be most impressive was quite thrown away on the impatient ears of her young charges.

Hats and jackets were hurriedly put on, and the day pupils took their departure; and when they found themselves on the Minster Green, who was the first person they saw but the old Dean toddling across from the direction of the news-room. And what must some of the boldest and most eager of these girls do, but actually run up to him, and ask him if he knew who had won the race!

"What! what!" cried the good natured old Dean,

pretending to be much surprised at such a question. "Boat-races! How should I know about these things, my dears? Do you really wish to know? Well," he added, with a twinkle in his eye, "there will be a telegram in about an hour's time."

"In an hour," said Lotty, when this intelligence had been communicated to her. "I shall just have finished dinner by that time, and my brother has promised to bring me the news as soon as it arrives. Then I will come and tell you, Maria, that Cambridge has won. Shall you have finished dinner at half-past one?"

"We lunch at one," said Maria, grandly, meaning Lotty to remember that she lived in a fashionable style, and was altogether superior to such ordinary people as the Bryants.

"Then you had better eat a good one," said Lotty, unrebuked, "for you won't be able to eat a mouthful all the rest of the day when you hear of the beating your fine Oxford has had. Oh! shan't I crow over you for a fortnight?"

Maria did not deign any reply to this pleasantry, but drew herself up and walked away home, thinking that Lotty was a very vulgar and troublesome girl, and that she ought not to be so familiar with her. You will take into consideration that our young lady was an only daughter, accustomed to think a good



LOTTIE AND MARIA.

deal of herself, and to have her own way in most things.

In spite of the confident tone which Maria used before others, she was obliged to confess to herself that after all Oxford might lose, and then she did not relish the idea of being teased and laughed at by that chattering Lotty Bryant, who never scrupled to make fun even of a Fitzgerald. So, when lunch was over, she made haste to go out, hoping to escape her school-fellow's visit, and to learn the looked-for news in some other way. Oh! she should be so vexed if Oxford hadn't won.

But as soon as she left her mother's house whom did she see but Lotty, capering across the Minster Green in a most unbecoming way, as Maria thought, already beginning to find fault with Lotty in her mind: for she at once knew that the Champion of Cambridge was coming in triumph.

"Hurrah!" shouted Lotty, when still thirty yards off, waving her arms about in a most unlady-like fashion. Have you heard? Cambridge has won! Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Who told you?"

"Oh, it's all over the town! Now, Maria, I told you I should tease you. You were *so* sure, you know. Of *course* Oxford would win. Oxford *always* won. Oxford *must* win. What do you think of it

now, Maria? I wish I had made a bargain with you that you were to go down on your knees and sing out, 'Cambridge for ever,' if you lost. You're always right, of course."

"Don't talk nonsense, Charlotte."

"Now you are vexed; you know you are. Are you not vexed, Maria?"

"I don't see why I should be vexed," said Maria, stiffly. "Of course Oxford may have been beaten by an accident, or it may be all a mistake; or——"

"Not a bit of it. There's no mistake, and no accident, and the whole truth is, that Oxford is beaten, and that Maria Fitzgerald is wrong for once in her life. I told you I should tease you, dear."

"What a fuss you are making!" said Maria, abruptly ending the conversation, and walking on, while Lotty ran off, open mouthed, to spread the news in other quarters.

Maria was, vexed, even more than she showed. "Perhaps it isn't true," she said to herself; but as she walked on, this hope left her. At every step she saw some new sign of the victory of Cambridge. Up came the baker's cart, and the baker's man had a light blue favour in his button-hole. A telegraph boy, with a piece of light blue paper twisted round his cap, was coming out of the Deanery. The Bryants' big dog, Booby, had already been decorated

with a light blue bow on his head and a dark blue one on his tail, and gravely trotting about the Green was conveying to all whom it might concern this ingenious and symbolical intimation of the triumph of Cambridge and the discomfiture of Oxford. Mr. Nowell, the minor canon, generally so prim and dignified, was rushing about in a sudden frenzy, which had outwardly broken out in the form of several yards of light blue ribbon disposed about his neck and waistcoat. And here came the boys of the grammar-school racing up the hill, her brother Frank at the head of them. Mr. Dalton, the head master, was a Cambridge man, and of course he had given them a holiday. Maria never could face the grammar-school boys, and now she turned and fled, and hastened to seek sympathy and consolation from her mother.

Mrs. Fitzgerald was adding up some accounts, when Maria burst in upon her with the woeful tale.

"Oh, mamma!"

"What's the matter?" cried Mrs. Fitzgerald, in alarm, letting drop her pen.

"Oxford hasn't won!"

"Is that all? Dear me, Maria, what a start you gave me!"

"But are you not sorry, mamma?"

"I suppose I should have liked Oxford to win, but I can't say I have troubled myself much about it, and really I don't think it much matters to you and me. One of them must win. Why, Maria, you look as if you could cry over it."

"Well, mamma, I made *so* sure that Oxford would win."

"Then, my dear, I should say you were very foolish for making sure of anything of the kind, seeing that you know nothing about it. Don't allow yourself to be vexed by such a trifle;" and Mrs. Fitzgerald took up her pen, and began to add up again the figures which had been driven out of her mind by Maria's sudden irruption.

Finding that her mother was disposed to make light of this terrible calamity, Maria took herself off to another room, and spent a great part of the afternoon in thinking. What was she thinking about?

Well, we don't always know ourselves what we are thinking about, and if our true thoughts could be bought for a penny, or whatever they are worth, we might be astonished when they were presented before us without disguise. Our minds have a trick of dealing with two quite different matters at the same time; one which is put forward for the sake of appearance, and of which we persuade ourselves we

are solely concerned with, while it is another which is kept in the background that is really exercising us. So Maria would have told you as she told herself, that she was thinking what a pity it was, Oxford having lost the race, and that it was this only which was annoying her. But all the while she was really saying to herself—

“What a rude, impertinent, vulgar, disagreeable girl that Lotty Bryant is, and why should I be so intimate with her and allow her to plague me with her silly jokes?”

This may seem very ridiculous in Maria; but I only hope none of the readers of this story have ever quarrelled with a friend about such trifles. Have they not yet learned how our blind and foolish hearts, that so often reject the richest treasures of love, will sometimes cling to the very shadows of hatred, and weave imaginary quarrels out of air?





CHAPTER II.

ANGRY PASSIONS RISING.

“**S**O Lotty is going to tease me, is she? But I won't have it. I won't quarrel with her oh no! I will only keep away from her and not allow her to be so familiar with me.”

This is what Maria said to herself as she went to school next morning; and in order to avoid Lotty Bryant's "familiarity" as much as possible, she lingered on her way till she was late, and had a bad mark, which did not put her into a more friendly frame of mind. And the first thing she saw was that dreadful Lotty putting on a gigantic pair of spectacles cut out of light blue paper, and grinning triumphantly at Maria behind the governess's back. Then, besides the bad mark, she was turned down three places, and this brought her beside Lotty, the

very girl she was so anxious to avoid. And Lotty opened out upon her at once.

"Well, Maria, are you quite sure Oxford will win this time?"

"Do be quiet," whispered Maria, turning away.

"As you have come so late, perhaps you will be kind enough to attend to the lesson instead of chattering," said their governess. "Maria, where is the town of Barcelona?"

Maria was not in a frame of mind to take much interest in geography just then, so, without thinking, she answered, "On the coast of Switzerland." But she turned very red when everybody began to laugh at this extraordinary answer, even that great gawky dunce, Nora Sargent, who was always at the bottom of the class and was supposed to know nothing. Maria couldn't bear being laughed at, and still less could she bear that Lotty should give the right answer and take her place with a little exulting skip and another mischievous whisper: "*Oxford* learning?"

Maria vouchsafed no reply to this question, but sat sullenly silent, and allowed herself to be taken down again and again, that she might get away from Lotty, till at length the governess asked her if she were unwell. "No," said Maria; and you may imagine for yourselves the tone in which Maria said "no."

"Then you have not learned your lesson, and I am sorry to see it," said the governess.

After that Maria would not condescend to say a single word. And when, at the end of the lesson, the girls were allowed for three minutes to leave their seats and talk to each other, Lotty came up and made matters worse by asking—

"Oh, Maria, do tell us all the towns on the coast of Switzerland. I shall never let you hear the end of that."

Maria turned indignantly away, and presently she was heard talking to one of her friends in a half-confidential whisper that was evidently intended to reach Lotty's ears—

"I wonder they allow such creatures to come to this school. Her father is only a builder, you know ; little better than a common workman."

"Are you speaking about me ?" cried Lotty, turning round and getting angry in her turn.

"Never mind ; I wasn't speaking to you," said Maria, drawing herself up. "Listeners hear no good of themselves."

"I can tell you my father is just as good as your father," cried Lotty, with red cheeks and angry eyes. "Anyhow, I would rather be the daughter of a chimney-sweep among the Hottentots than a stuck-up thing like you."

"Don't take any notice of her vulgar nonsense,"

said Maria to the other girls, who, nevertheless, were laughing at the scene ; for Lotty in a rage was a strange spectacle.

“ And don’t you say such things about my father,” she exclaimed, giving Maria a push which sent her off staggering against the desk.

Maria recovered herself and flew at Lotty, and then a scuffle took place between them, which met the horrified eyes of Miss Spencer, as just then she entered her dove-cot and found its inmates so unbecomingly ruffled.

“ Young ladies ! what is this I see ! ” she ejaculated, holding up her hands in dismay. “ Go to your seats this very moment ; and you, Maria Fitzgerald, and Charlotte Bryant, stay behind when school is over and give me some explanation of this exceedingly improper and unusual behaviour.”

But these two girls had no explanation to give, except that they had “ let their angry passions rise,” and each knew that she had been partly to blame ; so all that was to be done was to listen meekly to Miss Spencer’s scolding and receive their sentence : that they were to stay in and write out three French exercises.

Without saying a word to each other, the naughty girls took their places at different ends of one of the deserted desks, and began to work at their tasks in

no very good humour. But Lotty's resentment cooled down sooner; and presently, whereas Maria never raised her eyes from the book, Lotty was bit by bit working her way along the bench till she came within communicating distance of her companion in misfortune. Still Maria never turned her head, but in a few minutes Lotty said—

“Can you lend me a pen? Mine does not write well.”

“There are plenty of pens lying about,” replied Maria, ungraciously.

This repelled Lotty for the time, but before long she made another attempt.

“Maria, will you please tell me what is the feminine of *gentil*?”

Without a word, and without looking round, Maria pushed her grammar along the desk.

“Thank you, dear,” said Lotty, and presently was trying it again.

“How are you getting on, Maria?”

“I can't get on if you are always to interrupt me!” cried Maria, pettishly.

This silenced Lotty for some time; but when Maria began to put away her books and fold up her paper, she asked, “Have you done?”

“Yes,” said Maria, stiffly.

“Well, Maria, let us be friends again. We were

both a couple of stupids to fight about nothing, weren't we ? ”

“ You know best.”

“ I am sorry. I thought you would not mind being teased a little. Don't let us quarrel any more.”

“ I don't intend to,” said Maria, with her grandest air.

“ Then wait one minute for me, and we will go home together.”

“ I am in a hurry. I shall be late for lunch ; ” and Maria stalked off, leaving penitent Lotty to finish her punishment alone.

“ No, I won't quarrel with Lotty ; ” this was the way Maria deceived herself. “ She is not worth quarrelling with. But I must not be so familiar with her.”

When she reached home, Maria had expected to be met with reproaches for being late at lunch, but instead of that, her mother was keeping some good news warm for her.

“ Maria, I have a letter from your uncle Gerald. He proposes that, as it is such a fine spring, you should have your picnic next Saturday.”

“ Indeed,” cried Maria, not very enthusiastically. This picnic had long been a yearly institution in the family. The ostensible excuse for it was the gathering of early wild flowers in the lovely woods

of Maria's uncle, but there were other pleasures connected with it, and Maria had been accustomed to look upon this as one of the great treats of the year. It was considered her party, and the guests were nearly all chosen from her young friends, who were seldom sorry to leave school for a day and spend it in the open air among all the attractions of budding spring. But to-day she was not in a humour to be much pleased about this or anything else

"I have written to fix Saturday. I have no doubt Miss Spencer will let you and your friends have a holiday. And who are to be asked? much the same party as last year, I suppose?"

"I suppose so," said Maria, in an indifferent tone.

"The Greys, the Hammersleys, the Daltons, Annie Bell?"

"Very well, mamma," assented Maria, playing with the dark blue ribbon on her hat.

"Lotty Bryant and her brothers."

"No!" cried Maria, with sudden energy. "Don't ask them."

"Why not, my dear? They have always been asked, and you go to their parties. Besides, Frank will wish to have the Bryant boys."

"I can't bear them; they are a vulgar, stupid set."

"Nonsense, Maria! You know you used to like

Lotty very much. Have you been quarrelling with her lately ?”

Maria said nothing.

“ Well, we all know what schoolgirls’ quarrels are. Surely you can make it up by Saturday morning.”

“ I shall never like her again—never ! ” declared Maria. “ And I shall be miserable all day if she is asked to the picnic.”

“ You will be much more miserable afterwards, if you think that you allowed a little fit of ill-humour to make you treat Lotty rudely. I won’t allow it, Maria. Lotty shall be asked as usual.”

At this Maria fairly burst into tears.

“ My dear child, what is the matter ? ”

“ Oh, mamma, I hate her ! ”

Mrs. Fitzgerald said nothing for a few minutes, but let her wilful child sob on till she had calmed down a little. Then sitting down on the sofa, and putting her arms round Maria’s neck, she said—

“ I am afraid, my dear, you are giving way to that ill-temper which I have so often cautioned you against. I wish you knew how much vexation you give me in this way, though that is nothing to the unhappiness which you are laying up for yourself by not checking this bad disposition.”

“ I can’t help it. She vexed me so, mamma,” sobbed Maria, her trouble breaking out afresh.

"Come, Maria, tell me; was it not some mere trifle which you have quarrelled about? Nine out of ten of your quarrels are really about nothing."

Maria said nothing, but her mother guessed the truth, and went on to say—

"Yesterday, Maria, you were full of eagerness and anxiety about that boat-race, which one would have thought was of very little consequence to you. If I could only see my little girl eager to win a far harder victory, the victory over herself—her own jealous and angry thoughts!"

"I know I lost my temper, mamma, and I am sorry."

"Then forget all about it, and only remember not to do so next time."

"But it was Lotty's fault too."

"Very likely. And very likely she is sorry too. Come, Maria, we will ask Lotty to the picnic, shall we?"

"Yes, mamma."

"And you will promise me to be polite to her?"

"Yes, mamma. I will try," said Maria, drying her tears; but at the bottom of her heart she wished that Lotty was not to be asked to the picnic.



THE PICNIC.



CHAPTER III.

BEING POLITE.

THE day of the picnic came, and turned out such a day as was satisfactory to all concerned. Not one of your rash, fickle dawns, too bright at first, and then suddenly clouding over and playing mischievous tricks of cold and showers upon confiding travellers, but a morning which got out of bed in a cool, grey, thoughtful mood, and, after deliberately surveying the state of things and soberly taking time to make up its mind, finally resolved to turn its chrysalis clouds into a butterfly forenoon, and treat people to one of those lovely spring days which so often tempt us to forget the uncertainty of all things—especially the English seasons—and how even our sweet, innocent-looking May is at best but a capricious fair one who upon occa-

sion can frown as sullenly as kill-joy November, or rage-like blustering January, or sneer at our warm hopes of summer as unkindly as that cynic March.

Yes, this was the very day for the budding woods and the blooming meadows, and it was welcomed with high glee by our young friends, who, to be sure, having so much of "the secret of the spring" in their blood, could gild their happiness with the smallest ray of sunshine.

Nobody, you may be certain, was late upon such an occasion. By twos and threes all the boys and girls who were invited to the picnic arrived at Mrs. Fitzgerald's pleasant little cottage, among them Lotty Bryant and her two brothers, and their great Newfoundland dog, Booby, who, as usual, had invited himself to gallop behind the party and pick up any scraps that might be going. Maria received Lotty not very cordially, but civilly; she had promised her mother to be polite to her schoolfellow, and polite she certainly was—too much so, as Lotty soon felt. Not that Lotty minded much, though; she knew she had done her best to make up their little quarrel, and she hoped that Maria would soon "come round." Maria, however, had no intention of being more than "polite." Probably she thought she had destroyed her ill-feeling against Lotty; but she had only cut it down, not rooted it up. And so

long as you leave the roots of weeds, you know how fast they will grow again, and the worst ones fastest of all.

There was no trouble about the preparation for this picnic, no baskets, bottles, jars, and so forth, to be packed away, no salt or spoons to be forgotten, no plates to be knocked about and broken on the road; no, Uncle Fitzgerald saw to all that, and would provide a capital feast on the lawn, or in his dining-room if the weather should not be favourable. He sent his carriage to bring Mrs. Fitzgerald and one or two of her friends, and for the rest, two brakes, which had seen service at many a similar excursion, were hired from the hotel. Each of the invited guests had nothing to do but to present himself or herself punctually with whatever equipment he or she might think suitable.

As the day was to be spent in the woods, few of the company had taken the trouble to make themselves very smart, albeit none had taken the sensible hint of the poet, and presented a

"Figure quaint,
Tricked out in proud disguise of cast-off weeds,
Which for that service had been husbanded;
Motley accoutrement of power to smile
At thorns, and brakes, and brambles."

But Maria, not understanding that true lady-like

feeling would have prompted her not to outshine her guests in this way, had attired herself with great magnificence in the dark-blue dress which she had persuaded her mother to let her have made to celebrate the expected triumph of Oxford, and cast a somewhat supercilious look at the light print frocks of Lotty and other girls whom she was pleased to consider as "Not quite—*you know!*" for Whitminster has its select aristocracy, like other places, and Maria's head was already full of the notion that she was numbered in this select circle. So it came about that she contrived to get into the same brake with herself the girls who might be looked upon as belonging to her own elevated rank, and who were more "finerified," as her brother called it, than the rest; while Lotty and "that set," with Frank, Harry Bryant, and all the most noisy and troublesome of the boys were packed into the second vehicle.

Now it happened that in this brake there was a decided preponderance of light colours, whereas the occupants of the former were mostly arrayed in dark hues, so somebody was not long in dubbing them by the names of "Oxford" and "Cambridge." Then, of course, cropped up the idea of a race between them, if it could be called a race, when Cambridge started first, and the road was so narrow that its rival could not pass it. Off they went in this order; and didn't

the boys and girls who were creeping unwillingly to school as usual, turn round and look enviously after these holiday-makers !

But soon after they had got clear of the town, a slight delay occurred. The driver of the "Cambridge" coach fancied that one of his horses had cast a shoe, and pulling to the side of the road, got down to find he was mistaken. Then the driver of "Oxford," entering into the whim of his young passengers, made a sudden dash past the others and took the lead, amidst loud cheers and triumphant waving of hats and handkerchiefs from the votaries of the dark blue.

The drive had put Maria into wonderfully good spirits, and if you had seen her laughing at the discomfiture of the other party, and heard her shouting gaily, "Good-bye ; shall we tell them you are coming ?" you would never have guessed her to be the same young lady who could be so very cantankerous and sulky—or shall we say *dignified* ?—upon occasion. Here she was, smiling and chattering so pleasantly with her friends, who all admitted that "Nobody could be nicer than Maria *when she liked*."

And when, about halfway on the journey, they came to a steep hill, where nearly everybody got out to relieve the horses, Maria was inclined to be very

gracious, even to Lotty, and waited till she came up, and walked up the hill with her, talking in a much more friendly way than she had done since that stupid quarrel; but she could not help putting in a little spice of exultation over the trifling advantage they had just gained.

"Didn't we pass you neatly!" she cried. "Oh! I did laugh to see how silly you all looked, after thinking you had beaten us."

"Never mind, we'll beat you yet, perhaps," chirped Lotty, laughing heartily as a roguish trick came into her head.

They were walking behind the rest, who by this time had got into the carriages and were waiting for these two at the top of the hill. Lotty suddenly turned round and pointed to her dog, who was scratching in the hedge behind them.

"Look! look! What's that Booby has got?"

"I don't know," said Maria, looking back and taking a step or two towards the hedge.

But in a moment a loud shout called her attention, and, looking round again, she saw cunning Lotty, with her straw hat in her hand, and her yellow hair streaming in the wind, running as hard as she could towards her own carriage, which was waiting in the rear of the other. Maria tried to catch her, but she saw at once that it was useless, and gave it

up. Lotty's friends were not slow to perceive her ruse. They made ready to start; as soon as, panting and hot, she reached the brake, half a dozen hands laid hold of her and dragged her up, and while she was still scrambling in, the driver whipped up his horses and stole away in front of "Oxford," whose turn it now was to be deprived of the lead and to be greeted by a victorious cheer from its successful rival.

This was a very insignificant triumph, and of course most of the "Oxford" party had a good laugh at Lotty's trick; but Maria took it seriously to heart, and when with dignified and deliberate steps she at length arrived among her beaten forces, she looked as black as thunder, and would scarcely speak another word all the rest of the journey, except to mutter, "Just like the cheating tricks of these vulgar people."

I won't allow anybody to laugh at Maria who can't lay his hand on his heart and declare that he has never allowed himself to be put out of humour by injuries twenty times smaller than the prick of a pin. Remember, poor Maria had one of those moral skins which are apt to fester at the least scratch. She could not understand how the others should make light of such a matter, and all her unkind thoughts about Lotty returned like a flood, as she sat chewing the cud of her discomfiture and trying

to imagine it bitter. "But she would be polite to Lotty—all that day at least. Oh, yes, she would be *polite!*"

In due time they arrived at the scene of the picnic, and were heartily welcomed by Uncle Fitzgerald, who informed them that dinner would be at two o'clock, and advised them to be off to the woods at once and make the best of their time before dinner, for afterwards there was to be—ah! but that was a secret.

So off they went, nothing loth, breaking into parties of two and three, and wandering here and there, the girls mostly in search of flowers, the boys of bird's nests or to fish in the river; or some of the more civilized or less bold of the latter would accompany their sisters to climb the banks for them, and help them through the brambles. And, oh! it must have been delightful to wander about those old woods, bursting into fresh beauty under the sweet charm of spring, and to see the lithesome forms of boys and girls flitting and sauntering through grove and glade, and to hear on all sides the ringing laughter of merry hearts that echoed back the welcoming songs of a hundred wee birdies twittering to each other the old, old story of happy love that makes this rusty-dusty world go round, and then to bury oneself in some sequestered spot

within sight and hearing of the brown bubbling river that wound between rocks and thickets over smooth pebble beds and white cascades. Indeed it must have been a pleasant scene ; and looking out through my smoke dimmed window upon the fog and mud of Never-mind-what Street, I throw down my pen with a sigh and wish from the bottom of my heart that April had come to the woods again, and that I were there.

When you read this, April will perhaps be here, and you will surely not be as foolish as Maria, who was letting herself slip into such a state of mind that the joy and beauty which she saw all around her only seemed to make her feel more miserable. As she had evidently got into a bad humour, it was not to be wondered at that nobody seemed very anxious for the pleasure of her company ; but on the other hand it was terribly provoking to see how lively Lotty was sought after on all sides. It was, "Come with us Lotty !" "No, indeed, she promised to come with us !" "Oh, Lotty, we want you so much !" And then Lotty ran up to Maria and asked if she would not come with her party.

"No, thank you," said Maria, very *politely*, and turning away, she went off for a walk with one of the genteelest-looking but stupidest young ladies present.

It was not a very lively walk, for the genteel

young lady was solely taken up by fearing that her new dress would be torn by thorns, or that her complexion would be ruined, for she had lost her parasol; and Maria could not sympathize with her much, for she had troubles of her own. This picnic, she thought, was a dull affair. All very well while they were children, and very pleasant, no doubt, for rough romping tomboys like Lotty Bryant; but really, now that she was getting her dresses made longer and longer, she must persuade her uncle to give a croquet-party or something of that sort instead. Who cared for scrambling about woods and picking wild flowers? And then it gave such opportunities to these Lotties and creatures to be so rude and coarse! No; Maria was not enjoying her day, and already she wished it were over.

When Maria and her companion returned to the lawn, where all the party were to meet for dinner, they found the wild-flower gatherers coming back from every quarter with a wealth of posies made of those brave little blossoms that are not afraid to face the cold east wind—blue violets, pale primroses, white anemones, pink crane's-bills, yellow cowslips, golden celandines, humble colt's-foot, nodding blue-bells, tender heart's-ease. Here and there some one had to boast of a gay lady orchis already bursting from its buds, or a wild strawberry blossom, or a

swelling branch of hawthorn which in another day or two would have proclaimed with its white drapery that Summer was come to his throne. Lotty's whim was to bring nothing but a great posy of light-blue speedwells and other flowers of a similar hue, which she kept exhibiting in triumph. "Only to vex me," thought Maria, turning away with a pettish toss of her head; and, to tell the truth, it is to be feared that Miss Lotty's teasing propensities had been stirred up again by her friend's ungraciousness. But the greatest prize of all was a young squirrel which Charley Grey had picked up—a timid, trembling little brown creature, which, with its bright eyes and long tail, looked like a romantic mouse rolled up in a ball. Even Maria, who affected to despise "those rubbishing weeds!" was pleased with the tiny thing, and made one of the crowd that pressed round to see and admire.

"Oh, how pretty!" cried all the girls. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I'll give it to one of you girls, if you like," said Charley. "*Quis?*"

"*Ego!*" cried two or three girls who had the advantage of possessing brothers, and therefore were not ignorant of the language of the schoolboy tribe.

"Well, I can't give it to you all, so I will give it

to Lotty Bryant," said Charley; and Lotty ran off in triumph with her prize.

"That's always the way," thought Maria. "Nobody cares for me. That bold girl pushes herself forward everywhere and gets everything for herself."

As Maria was standing aloof from the rest and nursing such gloomy and jealous thoughts, Lotty presently ran up to her, after having put Master Squirrel into safe custody. Nobody could say Miss Lotty was not enjoying herself. Her cheeks were red as an apple; her eyes seemed to be flowing over with excitement; she was so happy that she did not know what she was doing, or surely she would never have ventured to rush up to Maria and actually put her arm round that elegant young lady's neck.

"Don't be silly!" cried Maria, shaking her off, not very politely this time.

"What's the matter with you, Maria? Why don't you come and play with us?"

"I hope I have more sense than to make such a fool of myself," said Maria, looking scornfully on a group of Lotty's cronies, who now came up, and, crowned with fantastic garlands of wild flowers, were dancing and frisking about in a way that would have done your eyes good to see. But Maria frowned at their indecorous antics, and pointing to their floral

adornments with her parasol, said severely, "I do hope you will take off these things before my uncle sees you. He will think you are mad."

"No, he won't! Your uncle is a jolly old man, I like him," shouted wild Lotty.

Maria was horrified at hearing a relation of hers spoken of in such a familiar style by a vulgar girl like Lotty. She fixed one indignant stare on the presumptuous offender, who, so far from sinking into the ground or being stone-struck by due shame, only laughed and winked, and made signs to her companions which Maria did not understand. This was not to be borne; Miss Fitzgerald tossed her head and was strutting away to seek more congenial society.

But why were they all laughing at her? And what did some impudent girl mean by calling out, "Your uncle will think *you* are mad, Maria!" And why were these rude boys looking at her hat and grinning? And why was even Booby, with a great collar of daisies round his neck, jumping upon her and barking in her face with such impertinent delight? Maria put up her hand and found that her head-dress had been supplemented by an absurd wreath of light-blue flowers with spikes of grass stuck into it all round, so as to make it look like a lunatic's crown. Then they all laughed at her

louder than ever. Maria did not laugh, but turned quite pale and rushed back to Lotty Bryant.

"It was you did it! You nasty, spiteful, horrid——"

"Oh, Maria, don't be angry; it was a joke. I'll try not to laugh, but you did look so funny, you know. I'll never, never do it again."

"I'll never speak to you again!" cried Maria, bursting into tears. "Never!" and breaking away from the group, she plunged into the shrubbery and ran through the trees, till she reached a sheltered nook by the riverside, where she sat down on a mossy log and gave way to a passionate fit of sobbing.

Poor Maria!





CHAPTER IV.

POOR MARIA!

POOOR Maria! while she sits crying in that sequestered nook by the river, I will lead the reader aside for one moment, and take the chance of saying a word to him, for which I would ask his serious attention.

Maria was foolish, was she not? Well, we perhaps may not be quite so foolish, but do we never allow our minds to be soured or inflamed by petty matters which a little common sense and kindly feeling would teach us to make light of? We have seen how this girl allowed a tiny spark to fall into her heart and remain there. The sparks of discord are always flying about the world, and most of us have not to look farther than our own daily life to see what harm they are constantly doing. There

are some natures so happy that these sparks seldom fall on them, or, falling, find no nourishment and go out at once. There are others which seem to attract such sparks, which, if not quickly extinguished, spread, and burn up the kindly humours of the heart till it becomes hot and dry, and like tinder for all the rubs of life. It is easy to extinguish them at first : one drop of love, one breeze of merriment, one handful of employment, will do it for young people, in whom indeed the mere flow of spirits generally prevents the mischief from going far, to all appearance at least. But the real danger is in letting anger burn without an effort to check it. You may say I am preaching, and skip over this paragraph ; but some day, if you took my advice now, you would thank me for warning you to form good habits while your young natures are still "wax to receive and marble to retain." And no better habit can be formed in youth than that of crushing these beginnings of anger, which become harder to destroy every day that they are allowed to have their way. You do not see this now, when your bad humours are able to evaporate in hot words, or sudden blows, or a fit of passionate tears ; but wait ! Or look at those old people you know of, whom you say you dislike because they are sour, crabbed, grumpy ; you should rather pity them, and, above all, take warning from

them. Whatever you may suffer from their ill-temper is nothing to what they inflict upon themselves in the loss of sweet and loving emotions. Ask them what they would not give if, when young, they had laboured to quench their first motions of ill-will and ill-temper, and to cultivate habits of sympathy and cheerfulness. Once they, too, laughed at such good advice, but now, be sure, it is often a bitter thought to them that they did not listen to it in time.

And now let us return to Maria, who in the meantime has been sitting on a moss-grown log, with her face buried in her hands, and letting her angry tears pass away into sullen sobs. Her unhappiness seemed strangely out of place in that lovely spot, where everything spoke of liveliness, and pleasure, and beauty. The grass at her feet was bright with the fresh life of spring; above her head the blue sky smiled between the bare branches of the ash trees; all round the sweet pure breeze played with the catkins of the hazels and the dry leaves of the beech, and did its best to soothe and refresh the poor girl's hot face. In the brown pool behind her, the flies skimmed fearlessly and cheerily over the ripples, and the speckled trout leaped up and dived down again with a wag of their tails and perhaps a wink of their fishy eyes, as they saw this dreadful monster in human shape, by whom, they said knowingly to each

other, they were not going to be deceived *this time*. But a little baby rabbit which was playing among the dry twigs on the bank did not run away; it crept closer to Maria, and sat looking at her with uplifted ears, and mild, puzzled eyes, wondering what could be the meaning of it all. Yes, ignorant little rabbit, you may well be astonished at the strange moods which so often disfigure and debase this human nature of ours, God's noblest work!

But the rabbit scampered off, when Maria at length raised her head and sat sullenly looking at the ground strewn with last autumn's leaves, and thinking of her troubles, which, it seemed to her, were greater than anything which man or woman had ever been called upon to bear. Everybody disliked her, everybody teased her, nobody pitied her. By this time the rest of the party were all at dinner, and most likely not caring what had become of her. They had sent a servant to look for her, perhaps; but she would not be found, she could not face them again; at that very moment they were, no doubt, laughing at her outbreak of temper. She hated them for being so cheerful while she was wretched. All had enjoyed themselves—every one but she—was it not enough to make her miserable? Then she thought of how happy she might have been, of how happy she had been at this picnic in former years; of

how she had looked forward to it and made plans about it, and had even begun to enjoy it that morning ; but then it had all been spoilt. Maria began to cry again.

But how had the pleasure of the day been spoilt ? When Maria had cried out more of her vexation, she began to understand this better. She was a sensible girl when not blinded by ill temper ; her good mother had tried to teach her what her faults were ; she knew that she ought to be on her guard against them. And now that her passion began to ebb as quickly as it had flowed, she was obliged to tell herself, if it was any comfort to her, that she alone was to blame for her troubles. She had a bad temper ; she ought to have tried harder to keep it down ; no wonder people did not like her. It was only natural they should like Lotty Bryant better than a sulky, proud, selfish creature like herself. After all, Lotty meant no harm by her teasing, and she had been very silly to take offence. It is a bitter lesson that, learning to see ourselves as we are ; and Maria might well feel that this was worse than any real or fancied injuries which all the Lotty Bryants in the world could inflict upon her. Ah ! if she could only go to her mother, and nestle on her breast, and cry it out alone with her !

Now, who was this flitting through the trees and shouting out Maria's name in every tone of entreaty

and remonstrance? It was Lotty Bryant, Lotty sobered and troubled—Lotty come to say how sorry she was for her thoughtless tricks—Lotty bent upon making it all up and triumphantly bringing back their mended friendship in chains of love and laughter. Maria guessed all this at once, but was not glad of it. She half rose up from her seat, and at the same time the evil feeling that she had been beating down in her heart began to rise again also. Humbled as she was, she could not yet face the friendly frankness which was trying to outstrip her in generosity.

No, she didn't wish to make it up with Lotty just yet; she was ashamed to be seen so dolefully in the dumps; pride reminded her that she had just vowed never to speak to Lotty again. So she stood up and stepped over the log as quietly as a mouse, took another step backwards, looking for some safe way of escape, slipped, staggered, and fell into the river.

"Oh, Lotty!" she screamed, as the water closed over her head.

Lotty heard, and by this time was near enough to see, what had happened. She flew to the spot, took one look about her, grasped with her left hand a bush growing on the bank, plunged into the water, and caught Maria's dress with her right hand stretched out to its fullest extent, shouting at the same time at the pitch of her voice,—

"Harry! Harry! Maria will be drowned! Come and save her! Quick!"

Of course he would! Schoolboys thirst for such exploits, as knights-errant for adventures, or hunters for game; so here was Harry tearing through the bramble-bushes heedless of his skin, heedless of his Sunday trousers, and bounding over bushes, and holes, and fallen trunks, towards the river-side. Quick! quick! But he was some way off—he stumbled—a wide ditch unexpectedly opposed itself; the brambles, planted, no doubt, by these stupid men of Gotham, were thick in his way, and all the while Lotty felt the roots of the bush by which she held giving way from the bank, and could scarcely continue to keep Maria's head above water; and her brave little heart beat very fast, and she panted out,—

"Oh, Harry! Harry!"

Boys can do everything. It is touching to see the confidence which the female sex put in ours when pain or danger threatens. Say what you will, woman chiefly claims her right to trust; and how brave and wise and ready does it not then behove us men to show ourselves upon such a summons! So, quick, Harry! never mind the mud in the bottom of the ditch or the thistles at the top! You can look for your cap afterwards. The jacket can be mended. But the fair, the aristocratic, the proud Maria Fitz-

gerald is drowning, and now you can bestow upon her a worthy return for the scorn and indifference of a score of juvenile parties.

Luckily there was another friend at hand, who was just as willing and more able to render aid. Big black Booby had been accompanying his mistress, stalking dutifully behind her, and casting sleepy supercilious glances at empty rabbit-holes. Booby had had enough of promenading the woods; he wanted to know when the eating was going to begin. But he was not so stupid as he looked; nor was he a bit lazy when activity was called for. As soon as he heard Lotty's screams, he pricked up his ears, threw off his dignity, like a man throwing off his clothes to swim, tore across the wood, understood the whole state of affairs in half a glance, dived into the pool, caught Maria's dress in his teeth, and paddled shorewards in a cool, business-like way that seemed to say, "Don't excite yourselves, you stupid two-legged people. Let me manage."

But he was not to have all the glory. Harry had puffed up by this time, and though there wasn't the least necessity for it, he, too, must go flopping into the water, Sunday clothes and all; and then, and then only, Lotty let go Maria's dress and hung on to the bank, crying for joy.

We will not here enter upon the question of who

ought to have the credit of rescuing Maria Fitzgerald. Harry certainly made a great deal of his own share in the matter afterwards, and poor Booby was too stupid or too generous to put forward his claims. Enough to say that between them Maria was brought on the bank and laid down unconscious beside the mossy log, just as other members of the party began to run up to see what was the matter.

When Maria came to herself she was lying in bed at the keeper's lodge, and Lotty Bryant was anxiously watching her, looking so funny with her wet hair and in a coarse dark-blue frock a great deal too big for her.

"Oh, Maria!" was all she could say, but she meant a great deal more.

"Where am I? What has happened? Oh! I remember. Lotty, Lotty, I have been so silly!"

"No, indeed, I have been so unkind to you, dear!" cried Lotty, kissing her friend over and over again; and then neither of them knew what to say to each other, till at last Lotty cried out,—

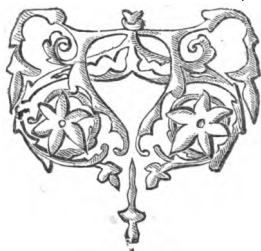
"Maria, Maria, I do hope Oxford will win next year."

"No, no, Cambridge!" insisted Maria, quite seriously; but presently these two young persons began to laugh and went on to cry, and were only able to stop themselves by another round of kissing.

And Booby, standing at the foot of the bed and

looking critically out of his half-shut eyes at these strange proceedings, wagged his great black tail in token of amusement, and yawned good-naturedly, and no doubt said to himself,—

“What funny creatures these people without tails are! and what a fuss they make about nothing!”



F U N .



F U N.



“WISH I could go with you to-night,” said Willy Grey to his sister Minnie, “but I have got this horrid imposition to do, and it will take me all my time.”

Willy Grey is not the boy Grey whom you may remember as being at Maria Fitzgerald's picnic, and catching the squirrel there. That story happened years ago, and that boy has whiskers and a moustache now, and would be very much insulted if you talked to him of impositions or any such thing. This Willy Grey is his younger brother, who was a baby in arms when the picnic came off, and is at the present moment, unless it

M

be a holiday, doing his Virgil or Euclid at the Whitminster Grammar School. His sister Minnie was at the picnic, though she was too small for us to take much notice of. Now she is a grown-up young lady, and is engaged to that gentleman, the Rev. Henry Hammersley, who is sitting on the sofa beside her.

"You are always getting impositions," said Minnie.
"Why don't boys behave themselves better?"

"Oh yes! I suppose girls always behave themselves well," said Willy.

"Not always. But they are not so bad as boys, I am sure."

"And how did you come by this imposition?" asked Mr. Hammersley. "Was it the Virgil this time?"

"No. I always do my Virgil, now that you help me, Mr. Hammersley. But you see, we were having some fun in school, and old What's-his-name caught us, and then it was, 'Write out three hundred lines, and show them up to-morrow.'"

"It's all your own fault," said Minnie.

"Well, I didn't say it wasn't. Fellows must have fun sometimes."

"But why not have it at proper times?" said Mr. Hammersley. "Because you couldn't wait for your fun till school was over, I suppose; you have wasted

your time, vexed your master, got into a scrape, and now you can't go to the concert with us. Wouldn't it have been much better fun attending to your work while it was school-time, and then not having to work in play-time ? ”

“ Oh, Mr. Hammersley ! ” cried Willy, quite dismayed to find one of his own sex turning against him, “ I thought you would know that boys aren't like girls. Surely you got into scrapes yourself often enough when you were a boy.”

“ I don't know, Willy. Whether it was that I was more thoughtful than other boys, or more delicate, or more cowardly, I generally behaved very well when I was at school.”

“ Did you ? ” said Willy ; and his brother-in-law, that was to be, laughed.

“ I see I have already fallen in your 'good opinion. You think I must have been a very worthless sort of boy.” (“ I didn't *say* so,” put in Willy.) “ But you can't frighten me now by calling me a muff or a molly-coddle. It wasn't my fault that I wasn't so strong or so reckless as the other fellows, and that I kept more out of mischief. Not, mind you, but that some of the others who got scolded and punished more, were not really much better fellows. We have all our own temptations, and mine were not to the faults which are generally noticed and punished in

boys. Perhaps I should have been all the better for a little more activity and carelessness of danger ; but I know many boys who would do a great deal more good to themselves and to others, if they were a little more careful about their ' fun,' and didn't think it such a light matter to get into scrapes."

"Do you mean to say that you *never* got into a scrape when you were at school?" asked Willy.

"Yes, you did," said Minnie, who, from having been brought up among a large family of brothers, had in some degree imbibed their notions of morality, and was anxious to uphold the credit of her lover ; "I am sure, though, that you weren't so naughty as Willy is."

"Naughty, indeed!" cried Willy. "Only girls are naughty, and little babies; boys are mischievous."

"Well," said Mr. Hammersley, "I won't go so far as to say I was never mischievous, but really, when I think over my school life, I can only once remember getting into serious trouble."

"What was it about? Were you licked?" asked Willy, with great interest.

"You shall hear if you like. We have half an hour to spare before we start for the concert, and, if you like, I will tell you the story of my first and last scrape."

"All right!" cried Willy, preparing himself to

hear some strange revelations from the life of a boy who actually dared to confess that he had made a point of behaving himself well at school.

Of course Minnie Grey was eager to hear the story, and Mr. Hammersley proceeded to tell it as follows :—

“ When I first left home, I was a boarder in the school house here, some fifteen years or so ago. I was rather delicate, as I think I told you, and the rough ways of the boys didn't altogether suit me, though most of them were kind and considerate enough. I saw many things, too, which made my small conscience uneasy, for I had been carefully brought up at home, and taught, both by example and precept, that the first thing every one should think of, was doing right and pleasing others as far as he could. This doctrine I found not to be fashionable at school, and was so far influenced by the ways of the place, that I was equally afraid of taking part in anything which I had been taught was wrong, and of speaking out against it. So I rather shrank from the companionship of the other boys, and for some time I was very lonely. My elder brother was at the school, too, but he worked very hard ; besides, he had his own friends and pursuits, and he did not take much notice of a little, timid, white-faced thing like me.

“ But at the bottom of my heart I had a certain

longing to be as fearless and lively as any of them, and I almost worshipped some of the big boys who seemed to me so wonderfully brave and kind and clever. But my heroes thought as little of me as they did of a dog or a cat, and the only one who took much interest in me was a boy called Abbing, in my own form, who was full of all kinds of tricks and jokes, and appeared to me to be a very fine fellow. Abbing was rather addicted to making friends with the new boys. I had plenty of money, cakes, apples, and so forth ; in fact, we got on pretty well together, and when my good things were all eaten, Abbing didn't throw me off, but, I believe, tried his best to be friendly with me, and to form me into his notion of a desirable member of juvenile society.

“One Wednesday half-holiday in the autumn, when cricket was over, and football had not yet begun, and the fellows didn't know what to do with themselves, and were rather apt to find the sort of occupation which is always provided for idle hands, Abbing, taking pity on me, or not having anything better to do, asked me to go a walk with him into the country, and I was only too glad to accept his invitation.

“‘We'll go to the woods, and see if we can't get some nuts,’ he said. ‘Anyhow, we'll find some fun, somewhere or other.’

"We started off in high spirits, and before we had got a mile out of town, we fell in with our first piece of fun. We met a man who was very dusty, and seemed very tired. He asked us the way to Whitminster, whereupon Abbing, winking at me, pointed out a road which led in the very opposite direction. The man thanked him, and took it; and, as soon as he was out of hearing, Abbing laughed heartily and declared this was splendid fun. I thought it was a shame, but I held my tongue; for, while I didn't feel inclined to play unkind tricks myself, I was rather desirous of gaining in Abbing's eyes the reputation of being a spirited fellow who was up to anything.

"The next thing we came to was a pond, where we saw an old duck taking her brood of young ones out for a swim. Abbing's eye no sooner caught them than his hand went down quite naturally in search of a stone, and in a minute he was calling on me to join him, as he pelted the ducks and they were quacking and flapping and splashing in a terrified way, which, Abbing said, was the best fun he had seen for a long time. I did not agree with him; I could not help pitying the poor things, and wondering how I should like to be treated so if I were a duck; and, indeed, I was almost as frightened as they were lest Abbing should hit one of them, or perhaps lest the owner should come up and catch us.

Yes, Master Willy, I know very well what you are thinking of me ; but now I am not so foolish as to be ashamed of confessing that my heart was too tender to take pleasure in another creature's pain. I was ashamed of it in those days, however, and instead of speaking boldly out and telling Abbing that I wouldn't help him to be cruel, I tried to coax him away, pretending to be very anxious to get to a wood which was in sight, and where, I said, we should be sure to find plenty of nuts and blackberries. The ducks had by this time reached the farmyard and got out of danger, so Abbing came on and we made for the wood.

" When we reached it I was not so willing to go in, for there was a board staring us in the face, and warning us that trespassers would be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law, whatever that might be ; but Abbing laughed at my scruples. It was no fun, he said, to get into a wood where anybody was allowed to go, and I felt that I should be looked upon as quite unworthy of his acquaintance if I showed myself afraid. With some misgivings, then, I followed him over the paling, and we plunged into the wood to see what we could find.

" We wandered about for some time without getting much for our pains ; in my experience, nuts and

blackberries seem to have a provoking knack of having been picked the day before. But if we did not succeed, it was not for want of trying. Abbing led the way everywhere, breaking down everything that stood in his way, and I followed him without remonstrance, though I felt all the while very uneasy, and kept looking about for keepers. And before long, as we were crossing the plantation, a man hallooed to us, asking what we were about. Abbing set off at full speed, and I followed him, this time without any scruple. We thought we heard the man giving chase, so we made for the edge of the wood, and ran across country, not stopping till we had put two or three large fields behind us. Then we pulled up at a gate to take breath, and when we found that no one was after us, we stayed there for a little, and ate the few nuts we had collected.

"When they were eaten, and Abbing had shied all the shells, in lack of other missiles, at some sheep in the field, he was struck by a bright idea.

"'Look here,' he said, 'just catch hold of that side of the gate, will you?' and I did so. 'Now heave away?'

"'What are you going to do?'

"'You'll see. Such a bit of fun!' chuckled Abbing, and between us we lifted the gate off its hinges, and

Abbing made it stand straight up, explaining to me : ‘Do you see that old fellow coming over the field ? He will try to open it, and down it will go. What a joke ! Come and hide.’

“Off we went to a corner of the field, and crouched down behind a bush. We had just time to get under cover, when the man Abbing spoke of, who was a fat old fellow, evidently a miller by his dusty clothes, reached the gate. He took his hands out of his pockets and gave it a great push, and as it fell suddenly down, overbalanced himself and sprawled on the ground after it, tumbling face foremost into a patch of mud. For a minute he lay still as if he could not make out what had happened ; then, all dirty, picked himself up just in time to hear Abbing laughing, and to catch sight of us as we scurried along the hedgerow. We, for our part, could hear him using some very strong language, but he could not follow us ; for not only was he too fat to run, but his attention was taken up by the sheep, who had improved the occasion to make a rush out of the field. Leaving him to shout at and waddle after them, we struck into a path, and took ourselves off to a respectful distance.

“‘Oh, what fun !’ cried Abbing, and I pretended to laugh, but I did not think it was great fun ; for as yet I was not enough of a schoolboy to be amused

by seeing other people hurt and made to look foolish. Indeed, I went the length of suggesting to Abbing that, as the old man could not catch us, we might as well go back and help him to drive his sheep in; but Abbing seemed to think me a perfect idiot for proposing such a thing. And by this time he had hit upon a new piece of mischief.

“The footpath on which we were, led to a little cottage, in front of which was a wide ditch, and over the ditch a plank. As soon as we had crossed, Abbing gleefully proceeded to pull up the plank and drag it into the nearest hedge.

“‘What is that for?’ I ventured to ask.

“‘Fun,’ said Abbing. ‘Come behind the hedge, and wait till somebody tries to get over. I hope it will be the old miller. He ought to have a sousing to wash off the mud.’

“I didn’t at all like the notion, but I did not oppose my companion, and we took up our position as he proposed, and stayed there for some time, picking a few blackberries which remained to show that there could not be any children in the cottage. It was, in fact, inhabited by an old woman, whom before long we saw creeping along the path, with a load of sticks on her back. The thought of putting this poor creature to trouble smote me to the heart, and I begged Abbing to put back the plank.

“‘Nonsense! what are you afraid of? It will do the old hag good to take a jump this cold afternoon.’

“‘But perhaps she will hurt herself.’

“‘Perhaps you are a donkey. I never saw such a muff of a fellow. You won’t go in for any fun,’ said Abbing; and though disgusted to have anything to do with such a cruel trick, I said nothing more.

“Soon Abbing had the gratification of seeing the old woman’s perplexity when she found that her little bridge had disappeared. She walked up and down the ditch, looking for a place to cross; but everywhere else it was wider, and she was too tired to go far round, so at length she stopped opposite the familiar gap, and, laying down her bundle of sticks, tried to scramble across. Of course she fell in, and, as we saw her floundering in the mud, and feebly catching at the opposite bank, Abbing’s sides shook, but I would have taken a dozen duckings for the moral courage to rush forward and help her. I don’t mean to boast of myself as better than Abbing, but the simple fact is, that at home I had always been taught, that to respect the old and feel for the weak was the part of true manliness; and the only thing I had to be ashamed of was that I durst not speak out and say so.

“But now we saw our friend the miller approaching in the distance, and, considering all things, Abbing

thought it might be as well to beat a retreat, so we stole away, leaving the old woman and the miller to make the best of it between them, and proceeded into the nearest field in search of further adventures.

“ We were not long in finding one. Abbing had helped himself to a good stick from a filbert-tree in the cottage garden, and he must needs find something to exercise it upon, which he soon did, in the shape of a drove of pigs that were feeding comfortably under some trees, but ran up to us as if to ask what we were going to give them. Then Abbing set to work beating them and driving them across the field, which he said would bring down their fat and do them good, and I could not help laughing to see how they ran, grunting, squeaking, and crowding together, while my companion pursued them with shouts and blows, never letting them rest for a moment, till they were nearly wild with fright and rage. But my laughing did not last long ; presently the leader of the herd turned sharply round, the rest followed, and the whole rushed against me, knocking me off my legs and trampling me into the mud. And now the courage which I had lacked to speak up for other people was not wanting to me, when the joke had such consequences for myself ; and as I picked myself up, a sad figure, I found my tongue fast enough to tell Abbing what I thought of his fun.

At this he only laughed, and I got angrier, and declared I wouldn't walk with him any more.

"‘I can't help it!’ roared Abbing. ‘It was such fun to see the old sow bowling you over! But don't get in a rage, man! It wasn't my fault. You will be all right directly—but oh! you did look so—I won't laugh at you—at least I will try, but—ha, ha, ha!’

"And then he did keep bursting out, as he helped me to get rid of the mud, and tried to comfort me by reminding me that it was an accident—that he was sorry—and so on. An accident, indeed! But I soon began to lose my ill-humour, and agreed not to leave him, only proposing that we should now go home.

"‘All right!’ said Abbing. ‘But just let us go up to the top of the hill. I want to look at that windmill.’

"So we went on till we reached the green knoll where we saw the windmill, and here Abbing made a discovery. The mill was not going—the entrance was open—it was to be reached by a ladder fixed against the wall—no one seemed to be inside or outside—and the miller's house, as we guessed it to be, stood at some little distance in the direction from which we had just come. So Abbing cried out:

"‘I say, here's fun. Let's go up into the mill, and have a look round.’

“ ‘But we have no business to go in,’ I objected.

“ ‘Never mind. Nobody will catch us. The mill belongs to that old fellow, I’ll be bound, and we can be off long before he can puff and blow himself half way up the hill.’

“ ‘Well, you go in, and I will wait here for you.’

“ ‘Come on, man. Don’t be afraid,’ said Abbing, already half-way up the ladder.

“I stood hesitating at the foot, but I didn’t like that word ‘afraid,’ and in the end I followed him, telling myself that perhaps I might be able to keep him out of mischief, and get him as soon as possible started on the road home, where I wished with all my heart that we were. You think I was a coward, I suppose ; so I was, but not chiefly for the reason you are thinking of.

“I climbed the ladder, crept in between the mill sails at the little door, and found myself on a dusty floor, half covered with sacks and corn-bins. Another ladder led to the next storey, where the machinery was, and two or three ropes hung down, by which, no doubt, it could be set in motion.

“ ‘Open, Sesame ! Here we are !’ said Abbing, who was already at work peeping into the sacks and tasting the flour. ‘Now, then, what shall we do ?’

“ ‘Go back,’ I proposed.

“ ‘Not till we have found some treasure or other,

and bolted with it, you donkey! You are a donkey; I'm Ali Baba, and Ali Baba had a donkey with him, you know, to carry home the gold, and diamonds, and stuff. I say, what fun if we couldn't get out again, and that old robber of a miller came back and caught us!'

"I didn't see the fun, but I suggested that we had better not give him the chance.

"'I'm not a donkey,' said Abbing; 'no fear of me forgetting the word to make the door of the cave open; anyhow, there isn't a door to this cave, and it isn't a cave. We have only to bolt down the ladder and there we are! But look here! What fun it would be to set the mill going before we made off. I think I know how to do it. You must pull this rope, then round it goes.'

"'Don't!' I cried, as Abbing began to handle the rope.

"I will,' said Abbing, and pulled lustily. 'Come and help. Don't be a muff!'

"Click—creak, went something above; the machinery began to grumble and rumble; then we heard the swirl of the sails moving round, and felt the floor vibrating under us, as the whole mill seemed to give itself a shake and start off in full clatter.

"'Oh, what fun!' cried Abbing. 'Won't the old fellow prick up his ears when he hears the mill going!

He'll think there has been a ghost at it. But now we must bolt ; for if he gets to the foot of the ladder we shall be caught in a trap, and I don't like the look of that big stick he was carrying.'

"For once, I heartily agreed to Abbing's proposal, and made for the ladder; but, to my confusion, I found an unforeseen obstacle in the way of our egress. To catch the wind the sails had been set in front of the entrance, and now they were whirling round so quickly that it seemed as if no one could set foot on the ladder without being struck by them. Don Quixote himself might have hesitated before undertaking such an enterprise in cold blood.

" 'Go on,' said Abbing, seeing that I shrank back.

" 'I can't. How can a fellow dodge through these sails?'

" 'It must be easy enough. The people of the mill must often have to do it.'

" 'Well, you try.'

" 'You go first. You are smaller than I am.'

" 'I should feel quite giddy.' "

" 'Well, I won't leave you alone,' said Abbing, with a sudden access of generosity. And as we looked from each other's faces to the sails whirling in front of us, we were obliged to confess that neither of us had nerve enough to attempt to gain the ladder under these conditions. Then, to increase our consternation,

we saw the miller hurrying up from his house faster than we thought he could have run. Perhaps he did not know himself that he could run so fast, but he remembered that he had left the hopper almost empty, and was afraid that his mill-stones would be spoiled, or, striking out sparks, might set the place on fire. We did not know why it was that a bell had begun to tinkle over our heads; but he had heard and understood this signal, and was making all haste; nor had he forgotten his big stick.

“‘We must stop the mill!’ cried Abbing, and pulled desperately at the ropes, and ran up the ladder to see if he could find out how to manage the machinery. But he could not; and the wheels went creaking, and the sails went swirling on, while Abbing tried in vain to stop them, and I, watching at the entrance, like sister Anne, was, alas! unable to reply that I saw nobody coming; for there was the miller drawing nearer every minute, and here were we shut up securely for his vengeance, and looking very blue as well as very dusty. I was a strange spectacle, with a coating of meal above one of mud; but the miller’s dress showed mud upon meal, and that reminded us that he had more than one score to settle with us.

“Abbing said nothing about fun now; he was dreadfully dismayed at the look of affairs, and would



"I'LL WARM YOUR JACKETS FOR YOU."

have given a great deal, I know, for a chance of escape. He went so far as to put his foot on the ladder, but he hastily drew back as soon as he felt the wind of the sails on his face. We durst not try it; and indeed it was now too late, for the miller was already close at hand, and in another minute he had reached the foot of the ladder, and was shaking his stick, and roaring out as we drew back into the inside,—

“‘You precious pair of young imps! I’ll warm your jackets for you in about half a minute!’

“Here was a pleasant situation!”

“As we heard the miller’s foot upon the ladder, I gave our case up for lost, and began summoning my fortitude for what was to come; but Abbing, more used to such emergencies, took one hurried glance round the mill, and that glance gave him a gleam of hope. He caught me by the arm, and slipping in between two sacks dragged me after him.

“We were scarcely bestowed there, than the miller’s face, red and perspiring, appeared at the entrance. He, big as he was, did not hesitate to slip under the sails that had frightened us so effectually, and flung himself into the room in a great rage—as we saw, and trembled.

“But the first thing he did was to rush to a chain which had escaped our notice behind one of the

great meal-spouts. Pulling at this, he stopped the mill; then, without looking round, he hurried up the other ladder, either supposing that we had taken refuge in the room above, or eager to see that no harm had been done by the stones grinding against each other. And, of course, we lost no time in taking the opportunity of slipping out of our hiding-place and scuttling down the ladder. Weren't we relieved to find ourselves on firm ground again, after such a narrow and unexpected escape! From the top of the mill the owner assailed us with threats and scoldings, but, not thinking it necessary to stop and argue the matter, we took to our legs and made for the nearest wood, putting on the steam when we saw a stout lad, whom we guessed to be the miller's son, running up the hill to his father's assistance.

"We took shelter in a little copse, and gave ourselves some repose after the peril and excitement we had just gone through. Abbing was rather depressed by the result of his last trick, and now he much more willingly listened to me when I urged that we should be late for tea if we stopped to have any more of what he called *fun*. So, in about a quarter of an hour, we set our faces towards the town, and soberly proceeded on our way home, giving a wide berth to the mill and the miller's house, and keeping a sharp look-out for signs of the enemy.

“But the enemy did not molest our march, to my great satisfaction ; and when we had come in safety as far as the old woman’s cottage where we had pulled up the plank, Abbing, whose spirits were rising again, conceived a new plan of mischief. After peeping through the window and seeing that the old woman was busy over a pot on the fire, he picked up a broken piece of brick, and announced to me that he was going to show me some more fun.

“‘Don’t, man!’ I remonstrated. ‘We shall be late. Leave her alone ; you have bothered her quite enough.’ I did not care to say that I thought it a shame to trouble her at all.

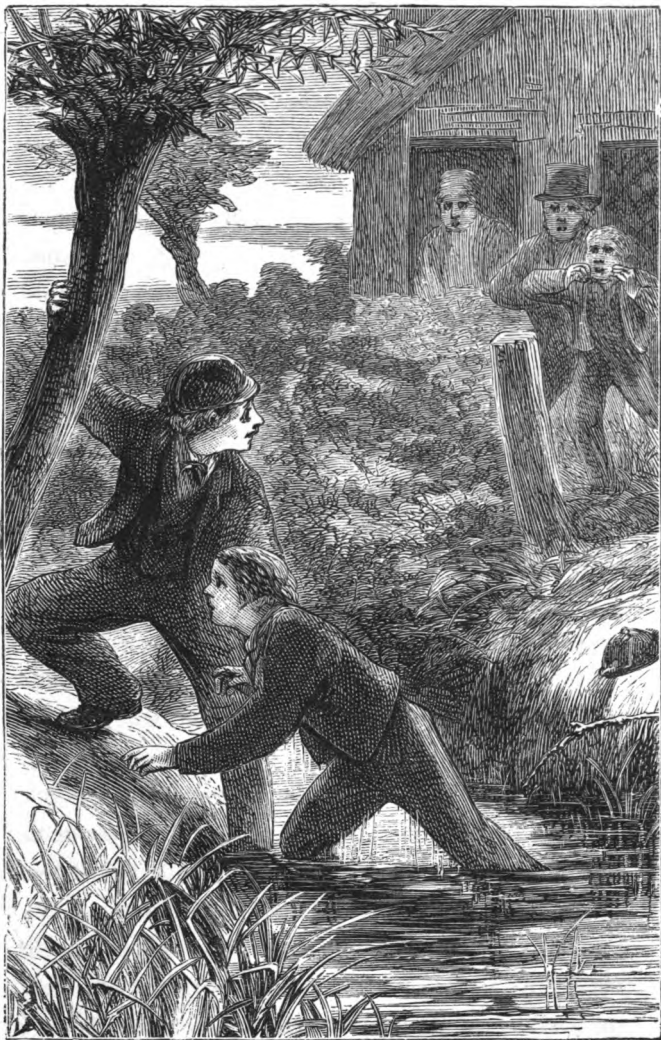
“‘It won’t keep us a minute,’ said Abbing, and, taking good aim with his brick, he threw it up so cleverly that it fell down the chimney of the cottage. A cry of astonishment was heard inside, and then an angry word, which caused Abbing great amusement, and he only took the trouble to draw back a step or two as the door opened. But when there appeared at it, not a decrepit old woman, but the miller and his son, Abbing changed his tune, and shouting to me, ‘Look out!’ dashed off across the cottage garden, smashing through bushes and beds and leaping the hedge in a moment. Away I went after him, and soon we were standing at the edge of the ditch and heartily wishing that we had not removed the plank.

“‘Jump!’ cried Abbing, setting the example, and falling just short of the further edge. Not a moment was to be lost, so I made the attempt and landed in the middle of the ditch.

“How I got out I don’t know, except that I scratched myself badly on a bramble branch; but Abbing lent me a hand, and I scrambled up somehow with no other loss than that of my cap, which I left to fall into the hands of the enemy, and flew across the field as quickly as if this was the first time that afternoon that we had been obliged to use our legs.

“We need not have distressed ourselves. The miller, at his time of life, had had enough of running for one day, and his son was perhaps not sure that he would be a match for us both together, though I don’t believe we should have cared to make a stand against him. So we were congratulating ourselves on having again escaped; but then I recollected my cap. We had left at home our mortar-boards, which we had to wear in the town, and had come out in our football caps, plain black with a thin red stripe, which, in those days, was the pattern affected by the grammar school; and my name was written inside mine, not so long ago but that the writing was clear and legible. I mentioned this to Abbing.

“Never mind,’ he said. ‘These country louts



A SHORT JUMP.

won't know anything about our caps. Tell Mother Bramble you have lost yours, and there's an end of it.'

" 'But the name of the school was written in it, too,' said I, remembering ruefully the pride with which I had persuaded the matron to perform this superfluous piece of description.

" 'Oh, you idiot!' said Abbing. 'You'll be had up about this. Anyhow, they can't find me out, and I'll say I knew nothing about it. You won't tell, of course.'

" 'No, I won't tell,' said I; but I was sorely dismayed at the prospect of having to face out such a scrape alone, and I wished devoutly that I had not been so weak as to allow Abbing to lead me into so much 'fun.' Abbing himself was evidently not at ease in his mind; and the very way in which he kept declaring that nobody could prove anything against him, showed that this was not his real opinion.

" We were pretty well tired by this time, as well as more or less cowed at the prospect of what might be the end of our adventures, so we had no more of Abbing's fun. And, still further to damp our spirits, it came on to rain. At length, wet, weary, and not very well pleased with the result of our holiday excursion, we arrived at the house just in time for tea.

“I was very glad that our fun was now over for the day, but I was not so well pleased when I thought, as I could not help thinking, of what might come of it. Indeed, I was so troubled, that when I went to the matron to get some dry clothes, I was moved to unbosom myself to her, and she first scolded me for letting ‘that Abbing’ lead me into mischief, and then sympathized with me, as she always did with the smaller boys when they got into trouble; but she could hold out no hopes of any other end to the matter than a sound caning, if a complaint should be made. When I went down-stairs and found Abbing telling our adventures to some of the other fellows, they prophesied the same sad fate, and my heart sank within me, for to be punished in any way, not to say caned, seemed very dreadful to me timid little new boy as I was. Abbing, now that he was in public, laughed and made light of it; but this did not help me much, and I could not even pretend to look on it as a thing to laugh at.

“The only consolation I got was from my elder brother, who, when I took him into confidence, cheered me up a little by saying—

“‘Very likely the old miller won’t bother himself to say anything about it, even supposing he knows that you belong to the school; and if he does, it’s only a caning, and it will be over in a minute.’

"I envied my brother and Abbing for the way in which they looked upon such accidents of school life. They were accustomed to getting into scrapes, but I—well, there is no use making a long story of it—in due time I went to bed, and for some hours at least, forgot all about my troubles.

"But when I awoke next morning you may guess what was the first thing I thought of, and what I thought most of at breakfast, in school, in the playground. If I could only have known what was to happen and had it over, I should not have minded so much, but the worst of it was the uncertainty—the notion that for days the cane would be hanging over one's head like the sword of Damocles, and might fall at any moment. This was not 'fun,' by any means. I was a coward, I suppose; all I can say is I couldn't help it; I tried my best not to be afraid and I could do no more.

"I thought it was going to come at length, when in the middle of morning school, my form was sent for to the head master's room. Abbing, too, was alarmed more than I thought he would have been; and as we obeyed the summons, he whispered to me:

"'Now, don't tell! No use getting me into the scrape, if he hasn't found me out.'

But after all, Mr. Dalton had only sent for us to examine us in our grammar, as he did once or twice

in every term. This was always a great ordeal to most of us, especially to nervous boys like me, who could not well keep their equanimity when speaking to such a great personage as the head master, even when he was doing his utmost to put them at their ease. And I must say for Mr. Dalton that he was the kindest and most considerate of masters in this way, and never spoke sternly or impatiently to a boy who was trying to do his best. But to-day I was more timid even than usual, and made sad mistakes in my grammar, and Mr. Dalton began to look less encouraging, as he scored mark after mark against me on his register.

“‘This won’t do,’ he said, shaking his head. ‘I am afraid, Hammersley, you will have to stay in next detention day, if you have done all your work like this.’

“At length I was put on to go over *melas*, *melaina*, *melan*, a perfect ogre of an adjective, which in those days was always a stumbling-block to me. I gave myself up for lost as I began to stammer out the first cases, and Mr. Dalton, desiring me to take plenty of time and think well before I spoke, threw himself back in his chair, and was waiting, pencil in hand.

“But to my great relief, there was a loud knock at the door of the room.

“‘Come in!’ said Mr. Dalton, asking me to stop a minute. Nobody came in, however, and the knock was repeated, this time a good deal louder. ‘Come in!’ cried Mr. Dalton, louder than before, but the only answer was another tremendous knock, which sounded like the work of a great knobbed stick. Then one of the boys opened the door, and there appeared within the room, first a round, red, whiskered face, then a stout body to match, and, lastly, a pair of not very willing legs; for it isn’t everybody, you understand, who cares to trust himself inside of a schoolmaster’s room when once the course of nature has set him free from such fearsome places. But the fear was not altogether on the part of the new-comer, for Abbing and I at once recognized our friend the miller, and looked at each other in dismay.

“Out of the frying-pan into the fire! I had been saved from *melas* to encounter this miller, who, dressed in his market-day clothes, was now standing awkwardly at the foot of the room and sheepishly asking if he might speak to Mr. Dalton for a minute. There was no escape now.

“‘By all means!’ said our master; and as the miller shuffled up the room he caught sight of Abbing, and was emboldened in his task.

“‘Yes! There’s one of them! I would swear to him any day, and,’—here he looked round, and you

may suppose what my feelings were ; I was actually glad when, at the end of that breathless minute, he fixed upon me, as I knew he would—‘and there’s the other.’

“ ‘What is this ?’ asked Mr. Dalton ; and the miller began to pour out his tale of our misdeeds, winding up by asking Abbing if he would call him Old Blubbersides again ? I forgot to tell you that Abbing had thought fit thus to add insult to injury, as we were making off from the mill. But he was not disposed to call the miller names now.

“ Mr. Dalton looked sterner and sterner as he listened ; and when the miller had finished his story, he turned to Abbing and asked if it was true.

“ All the time Abbing had been thinking what excuses he could make ; but somehow Mr. Dalton wasn’t the man to waste such talk upon, so my tricky friend gave in at once this time, only putting on a look of injured innocence, and declaring that he didn’t know he was doing any mischief.

“ ‘Hammersley ?’ asked Mr. Dalton, without entering into the matter further with Abbing. I looked on the ground, and pleaded guilty with a deep blush.

“ ‘Come to me at twelve, both of you,’ said Mr. Dalton, quietly—a little, apparently, to the miller’s disappointment ; for he had been looking round the

room as if he expected to see some instruments of torture lying about handy, and to have the satisfaction of beholding our execution with his own eyes. But we did him an injustice in this, for presently he put in a word, hoping that we should not be punished too severely. Perhaps he was appalled by the dread dignity with which justice seemed to be administered here ; perhaps he was touched by the consternation which was visible in our countenances. But Mr. Dalton now cut him short.

“ ‘The boys will be punished in the way their conduct has deserved. I am very much obliged to you for taking the trouble to speak to me about the matter, and I am very sorry that any boys in this school should have given you such cause for complaint. I think it won’t happen again,’ said our master, looking at Abbing and me ; and we thought to ourselves that it would not have happened at all if we could only have looked forward to what was now going to come of it.

“ Mr. Dalton said nothing more to us for the present, and went on hearing our grammar. But I did not answer any more questions ; for that once I stood almost at the bottom of the form. Nor when this trial was over, and we had gone back into the great schoolroom, was I able to do much work, for thinking of twelve o’clock. Instead of attending to my book,

I was exercising my imagination on those unknown terrors of the cane; wondering how it would feel, and how I should bear myself under it. I could summon up but little courage to my aid; and I was the more dismayed when I saw that Abbing, now that the danger was at hand, was by no means so careless as he had seemed to be the evening before, when it was still in the clouds. Indeed, he was rather more frightened than myself, and, getting next me, he discussed the coming calamity in such a despondent tone, that my apprehensions were doubled. Abbing had seemed a very fine fellow when fun was in question, but he was a doleful companion in affliction. I had not yet learned that people who are the most reckless in running up such bills are often the most unwilling when the time comes for paying them.

“At length, the clock struck, giving joyful release to the other boys, but to us, to-day, only the sad summons to execution. The hour had come! But I declare I felt rather relieved than otherwise when we knocked at the door of Mr. Dalton’s room. At least it would now not be long before we were put into pain—and out of it.

“‘I say, I expect we’ll catch it awfully hot!’” was Abbing’s last crumb of cold comfort, as, after a whispered consultation as to which should go first,

we presented ourselves in the chamber of torment.

“Mr. Dalton was writing a letter, and he only looked up and desired us to wait a minute, as politely as if we had come to do him a favour. There we stood near the door, shuffling, fidgeting, looking uneasily about us, and altogether unable to dissemble that our business was of an unpleasant nature. Would that letter never be finished?

“It was finished at last, and Mr. Dalton deliberately folded and closed it; then he rose, saying:—

“‘Oh, Abbing and Hammersley! I think we have a little matter to settle.’

“It seemed cruel of him to speak in this light tone; but I believe the fact was that Mr. Dalton could not bear having to cane fellows, and always tried to carry it off with a kind of nervous attempt at cheerfulness.

“We watched him closely while he went to the cupboard where ‘the snakes,’ as we used to call them, were kept. He took one out—Ugh!—the sight of it seemed to fascinate us, and we could not take our eyes off the yellow reptile which was soon to wind itself into more intimate acquaintance with our unhappy shoulders. I seemed already to feel its embraces, but I held up my head, and only wished it might be *soon*.

"To our disgust, we were at this critical moment interrupted by one of the other masters desiring to speak with Mr. Dalton. When he saw what was going on, he at first was for withdrawing, but, changing his mind, he came back, and they talked in a low tone for two or three minutes, that seemed ever so long to us while we stood waiting at the other end of the room, and eyeing the cane as it lay on the table. It looked frightfully long and supple !

"The master went away ; Mr. Dalton shut the door.

" 'Abbing,' he said, making a sign to my companion to stand in the fatal corner.

"This was another drop in my cup of troubles. I had hoped to be dealt with first ; now I should have all the pain of seeing Abbing's execution, and vividly anticipating my own sufferings.

"But Abbing was not going to submit without a final wriggle in the hands of stern justice.

" 'Please, sir, will you let us off this time.' I will never be so foolish again. I see now that I was wrong, sir.'

" 'You should have seen that before,' said Mr. Dalton ; and Abbing, seeing that fate was inexorable, buttoned his jacket, turned his back, and commended himself to Diana, goddess of school-boy fortitude.

"Down came the cane, and Abbing, though evidently trying his best to stand still and keep composed,

flinched and turned red. Again—and my lively friend began to look very wretched. A third—this time he gave a little cry, and struggled up the collar of his jacket towards his ears, as if to try the effect of this as a new measure of defence ; but his dodges were of little use. Twelve sharp cuts he had ; and the bold, the mischievous, the reckless Abbing wept bitterly. And I looked on and asked myself how I should behave presently, when Abbing, who professed to be as used to such scenes as eels to skinning, had all his fun so thoroughly knocked out of him.

“Now Abbing was set free, and somehow or other, without being told, I found myself filling his place, and holding my breath and setting my lips tight together as I waited for the next moment. It seemed as if that next moment was never going to arrive. I had time to count that there were five chinks in the wall opposite, and to notice a cobweb in the corner, in which a fly was struggling desperately to escape, and the spider was about to seize it. But I knew that Mr. Dalton had raised the cane, and when was ——?

“‘Please, sir, may I speak to you?’ Abbing was saying through his tears. ‘It wasn’t Hammersley’s fault, sir. I did it all, and he wanted me not to.’

“‘I am very glad to hear you say so,’ said Mr. Dalton. ‘This is the first time I have had to find

fault with Hammersley, and, in any case, I should be unwilling to punish him.'

"I scarcely understood—I could not believe my ears—I stood still waiting, till the master laid his hand on my shoulder and kindly told me I need not be afraid. Then I had hard work to hold back a tear or two, to keep company with Abbing, as it were.

"Mr. Dalton proceeded to lecture us, telling us how wrong and foolish it was to make such a bad use of our half-holiday and to bring such discredit on the school, besides playing unkind tricks on harmless people, and hoping that he would never again have a similar complaint made of either of us. I don't think we listened very attentively. When we went out of the room with lightened hearts, and some of our friends were waiting to know how we had fared, Abbing, having dried his tears, was laughing off the whole affair, by way of pretending that he didn't care—but he did.

"As for me, I wanted no lecturing to make me intend to keep clear of Abbing's fun for the future, though I was heartily grateful to him for having spoken out and got me out of the scrape.

"Well, Willy, you may think I was a bit of a coward, but you must confess that I was not quite such a fool as some boys are, sometimes."

"You were not a coward at all!" said Minnie,

warmly. "You were really braver than Abbing, I think; for when you had joined him in doing wrong, you were not so unwilling to take the consequences."

"That's not the moral of the story. I want my friend Willy to see that the fun best worth having is that which wears well all through, and doesn't begin by giving trouble to others, and end by bringing it upon oneself."

Willy looked as if he wasn't quite sure about it but he was evidently struck by the notion.

"At all events, canes and impositions aren't very funny things, are they?"

"No, indeed!" said Willy, and with a sigh returned to the lines of Horace which he had to finish. And of all lines in the book, the last he had written were these two:—

"Raro antecedentem scelestum
Deseruit pede Pœna claudo."

Which mean, that when we do wrong, we may escape punishment for a time, but sooner or later, even in this uneven world, are pretty sure to be found out and served according to our deserts. And there is not much fun in that.



THE VISITOR.




THE VISITOR.



CHAPTER I.

EXPECTED.

F you have ever been to Whitminster, you may, perhaps, remember that in the south-west corner of the Green stands a very cozy-looking brick house with a little patch of garden in front, and a brass plate on the railings bearing the name of "Mr. H. Bryant, Builder." In this house used to live one of the happiest families I ever knew. Troubles did not easily find a lodging here, for the inmates had a very good way of getting rid of them, namely, by trying honestly and diligently to do their duty, and kindly and truly loving each other, and good-naturedly making the best of all that happened to them—a way which is very simple, but which does not seem to be understood by many people who

complain that life is a bad business to them. Before we go to visit this family, I will just tell your their names.

First, there was the father, a worthy and prosperous citizen, than whom no one was more respected in the town. Then Mrs. Bryant, a model wife and mother. Harry and Bill, the two eldest boys, were about fifteen and thirteen; they have been mentioned before in my stories under their school-boy nick-names of "H. B." and "B. B." Between them came Lotty, a girl full of fun, which yet left room for plenty of good sense and good temper. We must now skip over two or three years, and come to two twins, Mary and Frances, who were always known in the family as Dotty and Totty. Last and least of all, Tony, a very young gentleman, still in frocks, who, to tell the truth, was a little bit spoilt by the rest, and punished them by giving more trouble than any one else in the house.

Having thus learned the names of the Bryant family, you will please enter the house about two o'clock one cold wet afternoon, and be introduced to them in the parlour, just as the dinner-things have been cleared away.

Mr. Bryant is sitting in his arm-chair on one side of the fire, reading the paper, and taking it easy for a bit, before going back to look after his

workmen ; opposite him sits his wife, examining a pile of stockings, which Lotty will presently help her to darn. On the hearth-rug, by the side of his master, reposes Booby, a big black dog, which by the bye, we ought to have taken into account as a by-no-means unimportant member of the family. Bill is already set to work at his holiday task, for it is the Christmas holidays ; Harry is mending a broken paint box for one of his little sisters ; in fact everybody has something to do, or is doing what he can to help somebody else ; everybody, that is, except Tony, who is jumping on a chair and loudly calling on Lotty to come and romp with him, which Lotty would be only too willing to do, if she were not otherwise engaged.

“Lotty is going to help me,” says mamma ; “for if we don’t mend these socks, you will all have to go barefoot in the rain soon.”

“Oo must play with me. Tony wants Lotty to play—don’t want any socks !” cries the small boy.

“Go to Totty. I dare say she will play with you.”

“Don’t want Totty—want Lotty,” whimpers Tony ; and then Totty runs up and kisses him, and shakes him, and dances him about, till his little highness gets back to good humour again.

“Don’t vex mamma,” says Totty. “Don’t you see she is busy ? Will Tony come and play with his Noah’s ark ?”

Tony graciously consented to turn his attention to a dilapidated specimen of toy-shop architecture, which stood in his private cupboard. It had once been a very flourishing establishment, but was now somewhat battered by the rough weather of the nursery. Most of the animals had died the natural death of toys; and those left had lost their horns, tusks, and tails to such an extent that even Tony himself was not quite sure which was the cow and which the elephant. Ham had long gone astray in the garden; Shem had been drowned in the gutter; and as for Japheth, most of him had been burned away one cold day, when he was pushed into the fire to warm himself. Noah and his wife, however, were still enjoying a hale though somewhat shabby old age; and Tony was accustomed to hold long conversations with them on various subjects of interest. But this afternoon he seemed unwilling to disturb them, and when his sister asked where Noah was, he replied seriously,—

“Noah’s in him’s office, writing him’s letters.”

“What a child you are!” cried Totty. “Who is Noah writing letters to, I should like to know?”

“Tony! Tony send letter to Noah, so Noah write to Tony;” and the little fellow, indignant that he was not believed, opened the lid of the patriarch’s residence, and, sure enough, pulled out a letter,

stamped and unopened, which he ran and threw into his mother's lap, saying,—

“Noah send letter to ma. Ma mend Noah's stockings.”

“I'm afraid Noah hasn't much left on him to mend,” says mamma. “But—what's this? Why, Henry, this letter is for you! My dear child, where did you get it?”

“The garden,” says Tony, as if letters grew in the garden. Presently he goes on to explain, “Tony in garden before breakfast; postman give Tony letter.”

“And why didn't you give it me at once?” cries papa, a little crossly; for people don't like their letters to be kept from them till they have settled down for a little snooze after dinner. “Tony is naughty to keep papa's letters.”

At this rebuke, Tony, who had thought he was making himself very useful, began to cry; and Papa caught him up and tried to comfort him.

“Never mind, then, my little man. You'll give papa a kiss, won't you? and promise that the next time any one gives you a letter, you will bring it straight to papa or mamma, like a good little man?”

This little matter being arranged, Mr. Bryant opened his letter, and presently exclaimed:

“Hallo! this is a serious business. I say, my man

Tony, if you were not so small, and didn't know any better, you and I should have a crow to pick about keeping back this letter from me. I ought to have had it this morning."

"What's the matter? Who is it from, father?" asked Harry, who was generally allowed to read his father's letters, that he might learn something about the business. "Is it from Sir Richard Hartis, about his new house?"

"No, indeed; I wish it was. It's from the Queen."

"The Queen!" exclaimed all the family in various tones of surprise and incredulity; and Tony forgot his trouble, and opened his little mouth, and cried, "Is Queen coming here? Will her have her's gold gown on?"

"No such luck. The fact is, your mamma and I are summoned to attend at Rencchester to-morrow as witnesses in the trial your uncle Thomas has to do with—about that railway accident on Christmas eve."

"Oh dear!" says mamma, looking mournfully at the stockings. "I thought they were going to try to do without us."

"It seems that we were the only people on the platform who can swear we saw the porter holding up a red flag."

"Didn't the driver see it?" asked Bill.



THE BRYANT FAMILY.

P

"He says he did not; but the fact is, I believe, he got flurried, and did not know what to do. The proper driver was drunk, you know, and he had foolishly allowed a friend of his to get on the engine and work it, and between them they managed to run into a goods train, and several people were seriously hurt. A good thing no more harm was done!"

"Well, the driver ought to be punished for being drunk," said Lotty; "but I don't suppose the other man meant any harm; it was all an accident."

"Yes; but we are all responsible for accidents which happen through our carelessness. The law of England, which is not so good-natured as you, Lotty, declares that if people undertake to meddle with what they don't understand, and manage so badly as to kill or injure others, they must take the consequence; and if it is true that this man caused the accident by trying to drive the engine without understanding how to work it properly, he deserves to be punished. However, that is all to be settled at the trial; but we must go, whether we wish or not, for here are two pretty little bits of paper, which tell your mamma and me that if we don't come, the Queen will do some dreadful things to us."

"Oh, papa! will Queen cut off oo's head?" cried Tony, throwing his little arms around his father's knees, and looking quite frightened.

"No, my ducky; but perhaps she will send us to bed without our supper. We must go, there is an end of it; and we must go this afternoon."

"I wish I had known sooner; but I suppose it can't be helped," said Mrs. Bryant, beginning to put away her pile of socks.

"Ah, Mrs. Mamma, but I haven't told you the worst of it. You are going to have a visitor in the house while you are away, and you young people will have to entertain him."

"Oh, papa, we shan't be able to have any fun," cried Lotty, looking comically miserable.

"We shall have to put on our best things," was Dotty's observation on this calamity.

"We shall have jam for tea," said Totty, taking a more cheerful view of the matter.

"Who is it, father? Is it Mr. Helps? Shall I show him over our jobs to-morrow?" said Harry, who was always delighted to have anything to do with his father's business.

"Is he going to stay long?" asked Bill, who did not speak so often as the rest of the family, but whose remarks, when he did make them, were generally practical and to the point.

"Bill thinks it is old Aunt Priscilla, who always has a headache, and would like you children to be shut up in glass cases, to be seen and not heard."

Cheer up, old fellow ; the visitor is one that I dare say you will all be glad to see, and sorry to say 'Good-bye' to. It's your cousin Percy."

"Cousin Percy ! Oh, that's jolly ! We'll have splendid fun with him," cried Lotty, whom malicious people called a tom-boy, and said she was much fonder of the company of boys than of her own sex. But it wasn't true.

"I'm so glad," said Harry. "We haven't seen him since he was quite a little thing. I hope he is going to stay all the holidays."

"I don't know. Your uncle Thomas says that we had better come over to-night and stay with him ; and as he has the house quite full just now, he wants to get rid of Percy for a time, and he thinks this will be the best time for him to accept the invitation we have so often given him. So, unless I telegraph to say we can't take him, he was to come this afternoon, and arrive by the five o'clock train. Thanks to your cleverness, Master Tony, it's too late to stop him now, unless we send you on the telegraph to meet him halfway. So he will come to look after you all while we are away. I hope he will keep you in good order."

"Oh, I like that !" cried Lotty. "He's no older than I am."

"Well, Lotty and Harry," said their mamma,

"you must remember that you are master and mistress of the house in our absence, and must be polite to your guest, and do all you can to make him enjoy his visit. I dare say you will get on very well together, and I know all of you will try to behave just as if we were at home. And, Lotty, you must send away that tom-boy we so often see here, and look after the little ones and the house affairs. See, here are the keys. I will talk to cook before I go, and you and she must lay your heads together and keep the family from starving till we come back."

"I don't see the need of that," says papa, who was always trying to be funny. "You youngsters have such good appetites that I think it wouldn't do you any harm to be locked up for two or three days on bread and water. But that's no business of mine, and I have no time to lose in talking of such trifles. The next train is at twenty minutes past four; can you be ready for that, mamma?"

"Certainly. Lotty, you will come and help me to pack, and while we are doing it, I will tell you about your duties as housekeeper. Dotty, get out a label for your papa to address, and then bring me his best boots, and brush his hat. Totty, go to the cook and tell her that the old white cock is to be killed for tea."

Then Mr. Bryant gave his directions to the boys,

bidding Harry go and tell his foreman to come at once and speak to him ; while Bill was sent up town to give notice that the Green Dragon omnibus might call and swallow up two passengers on its way.

Nobody in that family ever thought of anything but instant obedience to the orders of their father and mother ; so Harry and Bill turned up the collars of their jackets, and splashed off through the rain on their separate commissions ; while Lotty, trying to look grave, and to rise to the dignity of her new situation, went up-stairs with her mother, and Totty, Tony, Booby, and the cook repaired in solemn procession to the poultry-yard, where the old white cock was pecking lazily, and perhaps meditating over the uncertainty of life. It's a good wind that blows nobody harm ; and if poor cocky didn't remember cousin Percy's visit, it was not because he hadn't reason to do so.

Before the omnibus came up, all was ready, and Mr. and Mrs. Bryant, attired for their journey, were waiting for it, surrounded by their children, who seemed as concerned to part with them as if they were going to be away much longer than a day or two. Indeed, Tony wept outright, for Lotty, in informing him concerning the object of papa's and mamma's journey, had thoughtlessly given him such a description of the nature of a court of justice, that

he was afraid he should never see them again. Even Dotty and Totty were rather uneasy in their small minds, which had not yet grown out of the vague conception of a judge as a sort of bogey in a wig, whose chief business with people that might fall into his clutches, was in the way of hanging them. But there was little time for consolation or leave-taking. Up rattled the Green Dragon omnibus, in a hurry, as it always was; with a parting injunction to take good care of the visitor, the travellers bundled into it, accompanied by Harry and Bill, who were to see them off at the station, and wait there for cousin Percy, and escort him back in triumph.

Lotty was left with the task of consoling poor Tony, who roared sorrowfully, and insisted on going after his mamma without delay. But when Lotty liked to think, she could generally manage such business; and now she contrived to interest her little brother in his cousin's coming, and persuaded him to visit the nursery and be made tidy, to which Tony assented cheerfully, on condition that he was to be allowed to have his new boots on.

But presently he was troubled again at the thought that mamma would not be home in time to hear him say his prayers; and to keep him quiet, Lotty had to take him with her all over the house while she made due preparations for the entertainment of the

expected visitor, in which task Master Tony was anything but a help to her, as he wanted to play with the spoons and to have his finger in the jam-pot, and so forth, not to mention that every minute or so he kept calling upon her to admire his new boots. Then Dotty and Totty were to be passed in review, and to be sent back to wash their chubby faces a little more conscientiously. Lotty felt herself bound, too, to see that the tea-table had been laid out neatly; and, in fact, she had her hands full up to the very moment that she heard the omnibus coming, and was just able to brush her hair and get back into the parlour in time to receive her cousin Percy, who duly appeared, looking very shy and uncomfortable, though all the family hastened to do their best to make him feel at home; all, that is, except Master Booby, who, after sniffing critically round the stranger, returned to his post on the hearth-rug and wagged his tail critically, as if to say that other people might have their own opinions, but he, for his part, didn't think much of this new acquaintance.





CHAPTER II.

ARRIVED.

POTTY was very much mistaken in supposing her cousin to be shy. At least, his was not the natural modesty of a boy introduced among strangers, but rather that sheepishness which is often only the disguise of a very saucy disposition. And as you may see a bird transported to an unaccustomed cage, which at first hangs its head and blinks, and keeps frightened silence, but soon begins to hop, and chirp, and peck against the new bars ; so Percy stood uneasily for a few minutes among his cousins, and an awkward silence reigned over the whole party ; but in a few minutes, having gone upstairs to wash his hands, and, as it were, smoothed his plumage, ruffled by the journey, he grew bolder, and presently was standing with his back to the fire,

making free and easy remarks on all he saw round him.

Then it was the Bryants did not feel quite at home, impressed as they were with the important part they had to play as hosts. If their father and mother had been there to take this responsibility off their shoulders, they would have got on much better; but now very little was said but "Yes," and "No," and only Tony seemed able to enter into familiarity with their guest, for Tony, after sucking his thumb over it for a little, evidently came to the conclusion that Percy was a desirable acquaintance, and by way of making himself friendly, advanced to his cousin and desired him to look at his new boots.

"What funny things they are!" said Percy, somewhat contemptuously; but Tony took this quite as a compliment, for he embraced his cousin's leg, and asked him confidently—

"Can 'oo whistle? Tony can. Hear Tony whistle!"

"Don't bother!" said Percy, shaking him off. "I have had quite enough whistling in the train."

"Tony has been in the train," said the egotistical little man; but Percy wouldn't encourage his prattle.

"What a queer little tot you are. You look more like a girl than a boy, What's this?" and he took

up the end of a sash, in which the pet of the family had been adorned for the occasion.

"That's Tony's."

"Is it your tail? I declare you are just like a monkey. Only monkeys have tails, you know."

Tony did not reply at once, but, abashed by his cousin's ungracious reception of him, he retreated into a corner, and meditated on the accusation brought against him of having a tail, which so preyed upon his mind that in a minute or two he suddenly burst into a roar of anguish.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" cried Lotty, Dotty, and Totty in chorus.

"Tony hasn't a tail!" he bellowed, and refused to be comforted by all assurances that he certainly had not any such appendage. In fact, his affliction was so great and so noisy that he had to be carried into another room, where he sobbed and howled alternately, and was only quieted at length when Dotty brought a pair of scissors, and faithfully promised to cut off his tail the moment that he began to turn into a monkey.

"What a horrible row he makes!" was all Percy said, not seeming a bit abashed at the disturbance he had caused.

"He always cries if you tease him," said Bill.

"Well, come and have your *teas*," said Lotty, in the tone which befitted the mistress of the house;

and then, it suddenly striking her that she had unintentionally made a sort of pun, she burst into a hearty laugh, and again checking herself, assumed an appearance of preternatural solemnity. In the effort to do this, or perhaps because she was thinking how to comfort poor Tony, she was so far forgetful that she was going to pour out the tea without filling up the teapot; and Dotty and Totty, who were watching her with great interest, lost no time in proclaiming her mistake. Then Bill and Percy both jumped up and ran for the kettle, but Percy, desirous to show himself as a young gentleman of the world, pushed his cousin aside, and proceeded to perform the hot-water ceremony, talking all the time, and not looking at what he was doing, the result of which was that he not only filled the teapot till it ran over, but contrived to upset the slop-basin, with some hot-water in it, into Bill's lap as he sat down, while a few drops fell upon old Booby's paws, and made him fly howling.

"Hallo! I hope it isn't very hot," was Percy's apology.

"It's no matter," said Bill, bearing the pain, which was not slight, with Spartan fortitude; but any one who knew Bill well might gather from his tone that he had not taken a fancy to his cousin.

In the meanwhile, Harry had taken his place at the

bottom of the table, and, in spite of Totty and Dotty laughing at him, and addressing him as "papa," was trying to perform his duties with due gravity. But he did not get on very well; the fowl was very tough, Harry was not much accustomed to carving, and he found it easier to cut out a boat than to cut up an old rooster. Seeing how he laboured to find the joints, Master Percy, in no way disconcerted by his recent failure, offered his services, and would take no refusal.

"See, you don't know how to manage; let me do it," and he seized the knife and fork and went to work violently, tearing and smashing at old cockie, and making the gravy fly in all directions. "What a brute! I never saw such a blunt knife! There you are—no, wait a minute. Oh, I say!"

This exclamation was caused by the fact that Percy's exertions ended in the fowl suddenly tumbling out upon the tablecloth—all except one wing, which was propelled against the cruet-stand, while the knife, slipping into the gravy, made a fine splash, of which Harry's shirt-front got the chief benefit. All that could be done was to pick up the pieces; and after this exhibition of his skill, Percy retired to his seat, muttering something about toughness and bluntness, but nothing about clumsiness, and was content to confine himself to what may be

called retail dealings with the animal, when Harry had slowly but surely accomplished its wholesale dissection, to the complete satisfaction of all the family, including Booby, who sat patiently by, and regarded these proceedings with special interest.

Master Percy then devoted his attention to the meal before him; but his cousins had already seen enough of him to guess that he was a young man who thought a good deal of himself, and Harry began to fear that his task of playing the host to such a visitor might be less easy and pleasant than he had expected. So he followed Percy's example and applied himself to his tea, and the festive banquet was rather a silent one, till Master Tony came back with recovered spirits, and being fully persuaded that he had not a tail, allowed himself to be installed upon his high chair, and as usual advised himself to take a prominent part in the conversation.

"Won't 'oo have any more?" he said, seeing that Percy had pushed back his plate, and was drumming on the table with his fingers and staring at Bill. "Won't 'oo's mamma let 'oo have some more?"

"Don't talk nonsense," said Percy, annoyed because Dotty and Totty laughed at this suggestion. But Dotty was only a little less simple, and presently she began to urge Percy with hospitable

zeal, saying quite seriously, "Do have some more jam, Cousin Percy. You are out visiting, you know."

"I have jam whenever I like at home," answered Percy, with great scorn; and Lotty was dismayed, and thought to herself,—

"Oh dear, it will be very hard to please this creature. I wonder if he will be content with bacon for breakfast?"

But she dissembled the cares which weighed upon her as housekeeper, and with the tact and readiness in which girls generally excel boys, tried to start and keep going one and another topic of conversation.

Her efforts were not very successful, however, and everybody sat very glum, oppressed with the feeling that this visit of their cousin, which had been so eagerly looked forward to, had as yet turned out a failure.

After tea, things were no better, and the only disposition to liveliness shown was by Master Tony, who, in his mamma's absence, proposed to be rebellious, and wouldn't hear of going to bed when the time came. Thereupon Percy undertook to manage him; but his way of "managing" was to handle the small boy so roughly that he began to kick and howl, and Percy left him alone, declaring that he was the most obstinate, ill-tempered little

muff he had ever seen. Then Sally had to be fetched from the kitchen, and she made short work with the delinquent; for when Master Tony refused to "go to Sally," Sally went to Master Tony, and without further ceremony bore him away kicking and struggling to his peaceful couch.

This unpleasant scene being over, Harry and Lotty set their wits to work to devise some means of amusing their visitor. They proposed several games to him, but Percy somewhat scornfully gave them to understand that he didn't care for that sort of thing. Nor would he favour his cousins with any sustained talk, but wandered about the room, handling everything he saw, and now and then making a remark of an uncomplimentary nature on one or other of the Bryants' possessions. He scarcely condescended to look at Harry's collection of stamps, or the gorgeous bead mat which Lotty was making for the bazaar; but at length he settled down to a collection of scraps from *Punch*, where he possibly was interested by several pictures of rude boys which were to be found there. This did not last long, though; for presently he shut the book and began to yawn. His next move was to the sofa, where he plumped down and seemed inclined to go to sleep, leaving the rest of the party to be entertained by a view of his boots upon the clean antimacassar.

But now a proposal was made which offered some chance of passing the evening pleasantly and profitably. Totty reminded Lotty, as she sat darning socks, that their mamma had promised to let them make toffee some night, and couldn't they do it now?

Lotty paused for a moment's deliberation, as became a young lady entrusted with such a weight of authority: but all the family joining to press her, she consented, and pulled out a shilling and some coppers from the family purse. With this sum Bill was despatched round the corner to buy treacle, brown sugar, almonds, and a little ginger; while, Totty and Dotty descended into the kitchen to make love to the cook for the loan of one of her pans.

Even Percy seemed to take some interest in this project, for he rolled himself off the sofa, and volunteered his services to make up the fire, which had got very low. Harry was delighted to see this sign of sociability, but he was not so well pleased when Percy, after emptying half the coal-box into the grate, went on to use the poker so vigorously and indiscriminately that the room was at once filled with smoke, and the fire very soon went out altogether. Whereupon Percy declared that he had never seen such wretched coals in his life.

This was not such a great calamity in the boys'

eyes ; but when Lotty came down-stairs, after a visit of pacification and tucking up to poor Tony, whose slumbers she made sweet by visions of promised toffee, she was vexed, for Sally's services would have to be called into requisition again, and she had reason to know that Sally was not in a good temper that evening, resenting her being interrupted in the usual course of her work by having to get ready the bedroom of this sudden visitor. And, indeed, when Sally did come up with brush, shovel, and sticks, she handled the match-box so vigorously, and banged the fire-irons about in such a way, and gave such sharp admonitions to her young masters and mistresses not to let the fire go out again, that any one less self-satisfied than Master Percy must have felt rebuked for his carelessness.

This, however, was got over, and soon the fire blazed up brightly, and Dotty and Totty, with much more zeal and diligence than was at all necessary, were buttering the bottom of the pan, while the elder members of this amateur cookery society took serious counsel as to the proportions in which the ingredients were to be combined. Here Percy made himself very forward, and as if tired of doing nothing showed a disposition to take the whole management into his own hands. His cousins were only too glad to see him so much interested, but Bill did venture

to remark that he was filling the pan too full, to which Percy only vouchsafed to ask him if he supposed that he had not made toffee a hundred times, and didn't know how to manage as well as any of them.

The pan was duly put on the fire, but Bill's caution proved only too reasonable, for as soon as its contents began to bubble, the treacle ran over the sides of the pan, and before long the bright grate which Sally had polished that very morning was ornamented in a way which she would scarcely approve of. Then, to save the toffee from being all thrown away upon the black-beetles, they had to lift off the pan every minute or two as soon as it began to boil, and at this rate must have gone on till midnight before bringing the desired condiment to perfection. At first, Percy was positive that he had not made a mistake, and declared it would be all right presently; then, seeing that the materials were being wasted, he grew angry and tried to pour some of the hot sticky stuff out of the pan, in which attempt he not only treated the hearth-rug to a taste, but, what to him was of more consequence, he burned his fingers and was constrained to howl wofully. The thought of having given way to such weakness before girls so disgusted him that he threw up the whole affair and declared he would have nothing to do with toffee-making, unless he had a proper pan



TOFFEE-MAKING.

and fireplace. And as it was now near bedtime, and the toffee had not yet begun to grow solid, the others also gave up the attempt, much to the regret of Dotty and Totty, who, however, promised themselves the pleasure of renewing it next evening. But Lotty was not so sure about this as she looked ruefully at the mess which had been made of the clean grate, and thought how angry Sally would be when she found she had to clean it, and blamed herself in her capacity of mistress for having allowed such goings on.

But still Lotty was faithful to her duties of hospitality. She had tried hard not to laugh when Percy burned his fingers and danced about very ludicrously, and now she said "Good night" to him with all proper civility, and asked if she could do anything to make him comfortable. And when going up-stairs Dotty and Totty confided to her that they did not like their new cousin a bit, she reproved them for forming hasty judgments, and excused Percy for his rudeness, as being perhaps tired after his journey and not accustomed to be with girls and children. All the while she was thinking that she must try to get up very early next morning and clean the parlour grate before Sally came down and found out what had happened to it, in which case she well knew that Miss Sally would insist upon

doing it herself, that she might have an excuse for grumbling all day.

In the meanwhile, Harry remained down-stairs with his cousin, who showed no signs of being tired, but, on the contrary, seemed as if he were only just beginning to enjoy the evening.

"I never go to bed till eleven or twelve at home," he informed Harry. "Let's make ourselves comfortable now that we have got rid of all the small fry."

Harry felt rather sleepy, as he had been up early to do something for his father, but he, too, was determined to go through his part as host with due civility; so he and Percy sat down like a couple of old gentlemen in the big arm-chairs on either side of the fireplace, and proceeded to chat. Percy wanted to know all about the family and the town; whether Lotty had a sweetheart; whether their "governor" was very strict with them; what sort of fun was to be had in the place; what kind of fellows the boys were in his school; if they were not asked out to any parties these holidays,—for Percy, though you might not think it, had a turn for fashionable life, and prided himself much on his genteel accomplishments and familiarity with the habits of polite society. This was not Harry's line at all, and he had to try his best to keep himself from yawning, and wished

with all his heart that his cousin would think of going to bed.

This Percy had one habit which is only too common now-a-days. He did not trouble to look at a person with whom he might be conversing, but kept his eye roving about the room, as if to show that he did not feel bound to pay much attention to anything that might be said to him. And presently this inquisitive eye lighted upon a pipe and tobacco jar which stood on the top of the bookcase, and he asked,—

“Hullo ! whose is that ?”

“That’s my father’s. He smokes a pipe here every night before he goes to bed.”

“Well, I say, I think I’ll have one too. Don’t you ever smoke ?” and, without waiting for an answer, Percy climbed up and possessed himself of the pipe, which he duly filled and lighted with the first piece of paper he found lying on the mantelpiece. It was the washing list, which Lotty had with much trouble made out before going to bed ; but so lofty-minded a youth as Percy could not be expected to think of such trifles.

Having set his pipe going, he threw himself into his chair, and cocking his legs over the side of it, invited Harry to follow his example.

“I never smoked but once,” said Harry, and honestly added, “it wasn’t a success.”

"You were sick, I suppose. Oh, you would soon get over that," said Percy, puffing away.

"I never saw such a cool fellow," thought Harry ; but he could say nothing, and sat patiently listening to the words of wisdom with which Percy was pleased to favour him, giving him the experiences of a boy who had seen the world—that is to say, had been at a large boarding-school near London.

But soon Percy began to cough and spit, and in fact to labour somewhat uncomfortably with his pipe, which was a very large and foul one. He tried to persevere, however, and commenced an amusing tale of the wonderful trick he and some of his chums had played on one of the masters who presumed to interfere with their pursuits. But before it was finished he got up, put the pipe down, and looked unhappy.

"Do you know," he said to Harry, "I think I had better go to bed now."

"Aren't you well ?" said Harry.

"Oh yes—at least, I wish I had not tasted that beastly stuff you were trying to make. I believe it has made me sick."

Harry couldn't help stealing a sly glance at the pipe.

"Oh no, it isn't that," said Percy, eagerly. "It's a thing all our family are subject to. Just before bed-

time we often get sickish, just like this. Isn't it odd?"

"Yes, it is," said Harry, making an effort to keep his countenance, and was going to ask what he could do for his cousin, when Percy very abruptly said, "Good night," and bolted up-stairs.

Left alone, Harry indulged in a quiet little laugh all to himself; then, stretching out his arms, he treated himself to a good yawn, after which he was very glad to go to bed, but did not do so till he had gone round the house, with faithful Booby at his heels, and seen that all the lights were out and all the doors locked, as became a prudent head of the family.





CHAPTER III.

ENTERTAINED.

LOTTY was up early next morning to clean the grate for Sally, and her brothers laughed heartily when they came and found her with her housemaid's gloves and dirty apron, in which costume she capered about merrily for their amusement, and for a little Lotty was the romp again. But Lotty grew grave at once when the real Sally appeared upon the scene, and was very angry to find that some one had been presuming to do her work for her. It wasn't Sally's fault that there was not a quarrel; but it takes two to make a quarrel, and Lotty wouldn't be one. She went away, leaving the servant in possession of her domains, and set about other little pieces of work, which she thought she would do before breakfast, so as to have some time

free, if need were, for the entertainment of their visitor.

But their visitor showed no signs of eagerness to be entertained. He did not get up when called, and kept his cousins waiting an hour for breakfast. When, however, he did condescend to appear, they received him with great cordiality, even with an air of sympathy; for Harry, I am afraid, had not been able to resist the temptation of telling them about Percy's misfortunes in the way of smoking. When Tony heard that his cousin smoked a pipe, like papa, his respect for him was raised to a very high pitch, and the first thing he said to him was to ask whether he had an office and wrote letters, when he was at home.

From this, and other remarks, Percy was sharp enough to perceive that they had been having a laugh at his expense; and though now they were doing everything they could to make him comfortable, he chose to be rather sulky, and would scarcely speak a word all breakfast-time, but, after just tasting a bit of bacon, and leaving half eaten a slice of the buttered toast that Lotty had made for him with her own hands, sat playing with his knife and fork, and gazing ruefully out of the window, where the prospect was certainly not very pleasant.

Rain, rain, nothing but rain, which still came pouring and pelting against the window-panes, and soaked

the roadways, and filled the gutters, and kept everybody at home except those whose business called them out. Percy thought, with disgust, that he would have to spend the whole day boxed up in the house, and could not see how to get any "fun," which to him was a necessity of life. He hated reading, or anything that looked like work, and he had never accustomed himself to take an interest in any of these indoor occupations which wise folks, young and old, will take care to provide against a rainy day. Not that Percy was passionately addicted to out-door exercise, or the rain would not have kept him at home; it was some novel or exciting pleasure that he must have to keep him from dulness and disgust.

Between you and me, there are many people in the world who are just as foolish; but all sensible and right-minded men will tell you, as their experience, that nothing can lead to greater wretchedness than the habit of hunting after pleasure as the business of life; whereas those who set their minds on bravely and honestly doing their duty in the world will be sure to find on the way plenty of opportunities for mirth and cheerfulness, and will enjoy them all the more when they are not sought for so eagerly or found so often. The greatest luxuries, the most expensive amusements, do not in the end give nearly so much

satisfaction as the cheap, simple pleasures which are to be had every day and at home ; and if, while young, you bring yourself to use and enjoy these, you will be laying up a fortune of sound happiness which you will never lose while life and health remain to you, and will be able always to laugh at that ugly monster which the French call *ennui*, and which the English have no name for, a fact that speaks much for their sound sense and whole-heartedness.

It was this monster which always troubled Percy on a rainy day. The Bryants knew nothing about it, and I think I have told you why. Every one of them now had something to do. Harry, as soon as breakfast was over, went out to his father's yard, where perhaps his zeal for the business made him forget that he wasn't of much use, and was sometimes thought a nuisance by the workmen.

Bill, after a conscientious, though not very vehement, attempt to find if he could do anything for his cousin, settled down to his holiday task, and wrestled manfully with that fell foe of boyhood. Booby sat beside him and completed his toilet by brushing his hair with his paws ; after which he lay down on the hearth-rug and gave himself up to philosophic meditation on the nature of things in general. Lotty—oh, Lotty had plenty to do. She had to descend to the kitchen and resolve herself, with the cook, into a

committee of ways and means ; she had to keep Sally in good humour by helping her to make the beds ; she had to look for the washing list, which she was sure she had left lying about, but which now, strangely enough, she could not find ; and ever and anon she had to attend to the manifold wants of her little brother, for the Bryants did not keep a nursery-maid ; and Lotty, when not at school, acted both as Home Secretary and President of the Education Department. Totty and Dotty, also, were to be looked after, and to be set a copy in half-text. Besides, there were the stockings to be darned whenever she could get a little time. Lotty's school companions, who knew her best as a laughing, romping puss, would have been astonished to know how industrious and business-like she could be when at home.

Tony was her most troublesome charge. This morning he had no sooner finished breakfast than it occurred to him that he ought to have his new boots on ; and when Lotty reasoned with him on the subject, he answered by pouts and stamps, and gave other signs that he was about to vindicate his rights as youngest child of the family by a little exhibition of temper. Then Percy must needs interfere and cry out, "Go it, Tony ! I shouldn't be beaten by a girl if I were you."

This was quite enough to drive Tony into violent

insurrection, and he went fairly off into one of his howling fits, while Percy looked on and laughed to see such sport, which was not sport for Lotty, who for the first time allowed herself to feel downright angry at her cousin, as she tried to pacify the little rebel, and Percy kept on laughing at her and spurring Tony's wilfulness. If he had looked behind him, he might have seen Bill's face raised from his book and turned with no very kindly expression towards the boy who was teasing his sister, and who Bill wished wasn't a visitor just at that moment.

This little storm, however, soon blew over. Lotty said she was going down to the kitchen, and proposed that Tony and Noah should drive the cow out of the ark, and take it to the cook to be boiled for dinner; and Tony, who, to tell the truth, was tired of crying by this time, took this excuse for stopping suddenly, and trotting off to his menagerie, brought not only the cow, but the camel and a large piece of the giraffe, which he only stipulated were to be made into a pie, and eaten with red-currant jelly. The other half of the giraffe was kept to be whipped for having crushed Noah's wife in a corner of the ark and broken her crook. Lotty took this opportunity of reminding Tony that the less he said about whipping the better; whereupon he professed that he was sorry, and that he was "going to be good," and begged for

a kiss by way of absolution, and went off peacefully with Lotty, leaving Percy, Bill, and Booby to themselves.

For want of some one better to torment, Percy now proceeded to amuse himself with Booby, trying to pull out his whiskers, to tie his tail in a knot, to make him put his forepaw in his mouth, and so forth. Now Booby was the most good-natured dog that ever deserved a bone, and you might see him playing with the children for hours, and letting Tony heap insults and injuries upon him without ever taking the slightest notice. But while he considered it his duty and delight to put up with any amount of teasing from the members of his own family, he had no notion of being made a butt for the mischievous tricks of a stranger; so, after suffering Percy's ill manners for some time with as much silent dignity as if he had been a very Duke of Dogland, he suddenly opened his eyes and gave a low growl, which meant, "Paws off, sir, and don't meddle with a gentleman." Percy took no notice of this, but went on poking a sharp-pointed pencil under his claws, whereupon Booby, having given due notice that he was about to break off peaceful relations, thought himself justified in making a snap at Percy's arm. Luckily he drew it quickly back, so Booby's teeth only grazed the skin and tore his jacket; but this was enough to



KICKING THE DOG.

infuriate Percy, who jumped up with an exclamation of anger, and gave Booby a great kick in the ribs, which made him retreat for the moment, and stand with head and tail erect, considering the advisability of further proceedings.

"I say! what's that for?" cried Bill, coming forward to interpose. "Lie down, Booby!"

"The brute bit me. Look there!"

"Well, you leave him alone, and he won't touch you," said Bill, his annoyance getting the better of civility. "The way you have been worrying that dog is enough to make any dog bite you."

"I'll give it a good thrashing."

"You won't."

"Who says so?"

"I do."

"Who cares for you?" sneered Percy, turning aside, and affecting to take no further notice of his cousin, who sat down again, and called Booby to him for sympathy and consolation.

"Poor Booby! Come and sit beside me, Booby, and help me to learn this stuff. Take the book and hear me. See, there; put your paw on the place, and tell me as soon as I make a mistake,—

'Fear not, nay, that I need not say,
But doubt not aught from mine array;
Thou art my guest, I pledged my word
As far as——

"Oh, you stupid Booby, you have let the book fall!"

"What an idiot the fellow is!" thought Percy to himself, and stalking across the room, he went out and slammed the door after him.

Bill now applied himself to his repetition, but if he allowed himself to wonder what Percy was about, he was not long kept in suspense. In a short time, sounds of weeping and scuffling called him out to the passage, where he found his two little sisters, with red faces and tearful eyes, and Percy standing by, laughing loudly and crying out, "Go it again! Don't give in! I'll back the winner."

Bill pushed past him, and ran to soothe the angry passions which Totty and Dotty seemed to have been allowing to rise. Their elder sister all this time had been down-stairs, trying to sooth Sally, who was much offended because Master Percy had told her in a lordly manner that he had never seen boots so badly cleaned in his life; but now Lotty appeared upon the scene, with Tony in her train, and at once proceeded to hold a court of inquiry into the cause of the disturbance.

"Totty pushed me."

"Dotty pulled my hair."

"Cousin Percy told me to."

"You won't let them tease me, Lotty, will you?"

"Do make it up and be good," said Lotty, at her wits' end to know how to do justice in the matter, for she saw that Percy was at the bottom of it, and, indeed, he declared,—

"It's capital fun to see girls fighting."

"But I won't have Totty and Dotty fighting," she replied with spirit. "Totty and Dotty, dears, you oughtn't to tease one another and get into a temper. You will come with me and have each an inch of hemming to do to keep you quiet, and then you'll make friends, won't you?"

"Hadn't you better give me an inch, too?" laughed Percy. "Wouldn't you like it!"

Lotty looked at Bill appealingly, as if to say, "Do take this great baby away and let us have a little peace!"

"Can't you do anything?" said Bill to his cousin, not very blandly.

"There isn't anything to do on such a horrid wet day. I have been trying to play at fives here, and I believe I have broken one of the windows."

"What next?" said Lotty to herself.

"I never saw such a fellow as you," Bill's amiable cousin went on. "You won't have any fun with a fellow."

"I'll do anything I can for you. I told you so before."

"Well, pitch that silly book into the fire, and play at something."

"I don't know what you want to play at."

"You can do nothing in this small house," grumbled Percy.

"You can make a great row in it," said Bill.

Percy looked sharply at him, as if to say, "What do you mean?" but he could make nothing of Bill's grave face, and thought to himself,—

"I shou'd like to punch that fellow's head."

Lotty now led off her forces, and left the two boys, Percy sitting on the stairs, and Bill standing before him and waiting to hear what he would propose.

"I'll tell you what," said Percy. "I see some single-sticks in the lobby up-stairs, and there's lots of room for a fight. Will you try me?"

"All right," said Bill.

"Come along, then, and I'll give you something like a licking."

Bill only waited to mark the place in his book, then followed his cousin up-stairs, repeating to himself the last lines of the poetry he was learning,—

"Now man to man, and steel to steel,
A chieftain's vengeance thou shalt feel;
See here, all vantageless I stand,
Arm'd, like thyself, with single brand;
For this is Coilantogle ford,
And thou must keep thee with thy sword."

The two boys agreed to go into a large lumber-room at the top of the house, where, with Booby sitting by to see fair play, they at once began the contest, and not altogether in a playful spirit ; for Percy was annoyed at the way in which Bill had interfered with his amusements, as he thought, and was resolved to teach this cousin of his a lesson ; and Bill was equally determined to hold his own, and perhaps, if possible, to show that bragging was not always good at blows. And, indeed, Percy saw at once that he had met his match, for though he was both bigger and stronger, Bill was cool and quick of eye ; and though he stamped, and shouted, and flourished his basket-stick ferociously, his opponent was not in the least disturbed by these manifestations, but, waiting his chance, every now and then put in a stinging cut on Percy's arm or leg, while Percy's desperate attacks were nearly always deftly guarded and sharply returned. This didn't at all suit our friend, who waxed wild, and hit out recklessly, but only found himself more unable to touch his steady foe, and more exposed to those smart hits which Percy liked better to give than to receive. Crack, smack ! the basket-sticks clashed together, and the dust flew from Percy's jacket again and again, and he began to lose his temper, and wished he could find some excuse for putting an end to the battle. But Bill was not in the

least tired, and as Percy had been the challenger, he could not for very shame retreat, and had to fight on, now standing almost altogether on the defensive ; for he felt that he must be striped with blue marks like a zebra ; and the combat continued hotly, till at length a crack on the wrist made Percy call out and drop his basket-stick.

"Oh, you cheat !" he cried, "that was an inside cut."

"Well, it's quite fair. You were cutting at my wrist."

"I wasn't."

Bill shrugged his shoulders and said nothing, and this made Percy rage all the louder,—

"You little fool, do you mean to say I'm telling a lie. I've a good mind to lick you well. I could lick you at this or anything else, if you only played fair."

"Why don't you try ?" asked Bill.

"Because I don't want to have anything to do with such a cheat."

"Come on again, then," cried Bill, in his turn losing command of his temper ; and Percy stood to arms, and they flew at each other again, and what would have come of it I don't know, if steps had not been heard on the stairs, and Harry appeared to interpose, which he did, when he saw from the faces of the combatants that they were more in earnest than in sport.

"You had better put away these basket-sticks," he said. "They are cracked, and you are sure to break them."

"They'll do very well," said Bill, in whose mind the word "cheat" was still rankling; but Harry caught his arm and whispered, "Stop, Bill; you two will be fighting if you don't look out." Then turning to Percy, who had dropped his basket-stick, and seemed not too anxious to renew the fray, he asked if he would like to come out, as the rain was clearing off now.

"What a blessing!" said Percy, strutting away without taking any further notice of Bill; and Percy and Harry got their caps and went out, but not till the former had sowed the seed of another dissension in the family. For, seeing Tony in the hall, he put it into his head that he should go and worry his sister till he was allowed to have on his new boots, and run out in the wet with them. Which Tony straightway did, and on being refused, threatened to fill the whole house with his usual demonstrations of dissatisfaction.

"Oh dear!" sighed Lotty, looking out of the window at the two boys as they left the house. "I do wish papa and mamma would come home!"

Tony stopped whimpering when he heard this, and asked if mamma would be home soon.

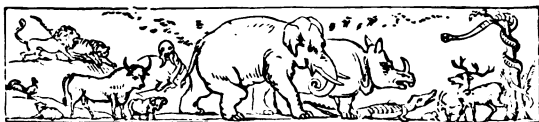
"I hope so, dear. We have nothing but trouble in the house while they are away."

"Then," said Tony, "me will be good."

"That's right, my darling," cried Lotty, catching him up and kissing him. "You would not like mamma to be vexed by hearing that you had been naughty, would you?"

"Tony not vex 'ma. Tony toast elephant for hers tea," answered the little man, and trotted off to his ark to fulfil this generous promise; while Lotty sat down to darn her socks, and to reflect on the troubles of the mistress of a family, especially when there was a visitor in the house, and such a visitor!





CHAPTER IV.

GOT RID OF.

AT the beginning of their walk, Harry found Percy not disposed to be very communicative ; but presently, as his ill-humour wore off, he remarked,—

“ I say, your brother isn’t half a bad hand at fencing.”

“ No, indeed ! ” said Harry. “ Bill is uncommonly sharp. He can beat me, I know.”

“ He can almost beat *me*,” said Percy, as if that settled the matter.

Harry thought to show his visitor round all the lions of the town ; but Percy refused to be much impressed by anything he saw.

“ *That* the town hall ! ” he exclaimed. “ Why, the corn exchange at Renchester would hold a dozen little bandboxes like that.”

"I'm sure it isn't so big," declared Harry, jealous for the honour of his native place. "I have seen it, you know, and it isn't much larger than our town hall."

"Then you don't remember much about it. Look at that fellow there! He can't manage his horse a bit. I wish he would let me get in and drive. I'd show him how to manage it."

"It seems you can do everything," thought Harry, but didn't say it.

"Is that the Minster, of which you people make such a fuss? I don't call it anything of a place. Have you ever seen St. Paul's Cathedral?"

"No."

"Ah!" said Percy, wagging his head wisely, "you should go to London; then you wouldn't think much of this little hole!"

"Here's our school. Isn't it a fine place?"

"What a tumble-down old affair!" said Percy, critically.

"Well, it was built ever so many hundred years ago. But you never were at a school like it, I'm sure."

"You are only a day-boy," was Percy's reply. "Wait till you go to a boarding school. Then you'll know what's what. And I don't believe this is a bit bigger than the Grammar School at Renchestre,

though that is a wretched little place. My father wouldn't let me go there for anything."

"Perhaps they wouldn't let you come here!" said Harry, firing up at these aspersions on his school. But Percy made no answer, and next went on to remark upon the river.

"Do you call that duck-pond a river? It's nothing to the Thames."

"Well, you bring the Thames here, and we'll think about exchanging."

"How stuck up all you people in a small town are about your places!" said Percy. "Do you think you can't see minsters and town halls out of Whit-minster? I don't care to look at such stupid things. Can't we go anywhere and have some fun?"

"Shall I go and look up some of the fellows, and get them to have a game at football?"

"Can they play?" said Percy, in such a tone that Harry thought it was no wonder Bill had quarrelled with this ill-conditioned cousin, and half determined to take no more trouble to entertain him.

They walked on for a little in silence, and then came upon an object which, though it is common enough now-a-days in our streets, was then novel enough to make any boy turn his head and stare. I am writing of a time when most of the boys and girls who read this were babies in the cradle, or playing at

soldiers in the nursery. But perhaps some are old enough to remember when the volunteers were first called out, and the interest which the movement excited. Not without glory—in the way of sword and feathers, at least—have I served in these dauntless ranks ; and though the riflemen of the period may be better up to their duty, and perhaps make less fuss about it, I can tell them that we thought ourselves very fine fellows. Certainly our costumes were more magnificent and imposing ; and the figure which now attracted the cousins' attention was that of a tall albeit youthful warrior in a brand-new uniform of light-green faced with red, his fresh, beardless face overshadowed by a most appalling shako, and on his shoulder a long rifle, which he appeared to handle with mingled feelings of pride and distrust. This was Fred Grey, a youth who had just left the school for an office, and for the less peaceful pursuits in which he now seemed about to engage.

“Hallo, Fred !” exclaimed Harry, drawing himself back with a comical affectation of fear. “Don't kill me, please, I *will* be good.”

“What's the matter ?” said Fred Grey, trying his best to look unconscious of his unwonted equipment.

“Are you going off to kill the French ?” asked Harry, disposed to look irreverently upon his old companion's armament.

"I'm going to practise at the targets."

"Do they let you have a real gun? You may have three shots at me for sixpence."

"Come and see us," said Fred, disdaining to notice this raillery. And Harry looked at Percy, who agreed to go, though, as he was at pains to explain, he was quite sure the Whitminster Volunteers couldn't hold a candle to the Renchester Volunteers, whose uniform, besides, was much more correct and elegant. Percy knew all about it, for, as soon as he left school, he was to be made a captain straight off—so he said.

They were now joined by Booby, who had hitherto followed at a distance, keeping aloof under the idea that they were going to school, a place Booby had a strong aversion to. But when he saw a gun in the company he was reassured as to the nature of the expedition, and fell in with the rest of the party, who soon arrived at the targets. These were fixed against a high bank, on the top of which flew a red flag to warn people away. To the left of the range was the river, and to the right a field separated from it by a high hedge.

Here they found about half-a-dozen volunteers practising at short ranges, for as yet our riflemen were not very skilful. Percy professed great scorn of their achievements, and more than once said to Harry,—

"What muffs these fellows are ! Why, the Renchester Volunteers would hit the target twice as often."

"Could you do any better ?" asked Harry.

"I should rather say so !" and Percy strutted about looking very consequential, and trying to give himself a military air in imitation of the old drill-sergeant who was taking charge of the party. It was very evident that Percy wanted to display his own prowess ; and when some one asked him if he would like to have a shot, he accepted the offer eagerly.

"Don't shoot any one," said Harry, warningly.

"As if I hadn't fired a gun hundreds of times !" quoth Percy, loftily ; and he began to handle the rifle in a knowing way.

Harry was much interested. To tell the truth, though he chaffed Fred Grey, he had been wonderfully taken by his martial appearance, and was thinking that as soon as he left school he would certainly ask his father to let him join the volunteers. And now, if Percy was to have a shot, why shouldn't he try his hand ? Harry came nearer to the firing-party, leaving the bank where he had been sitting and holding in Booby, who had been so much excited by the shooting that at every report he wanted to rush off and see what slaughter had been done, to his own great danger, and the perplexity of the marksmen. Now Booby was set free, and at once

threw himself out as a skirmisher to cover the movements of the main body and explore the neighbouring hedges.

In the meantime, Percy was loading his rifle, but not exactly in the way prescribed by the army regulations. Percy, like other clever people, preferred his own way. But the old sergeant, who of course was prejudiced in favour of old customs, called his attention to the fact that he was putting in the bullet first.

"I always do," Percy was just going to say ; but he checked himself, and in some confusion corrected the mistake, and pointed the muzzle of the rifle towards the sergeant while he was putting on the cap.

"Now then, sir!" cried this officer, sharply. "Do you know that I have a wife and six children at home? and, if it's all the same to you, they would rather see me come back alive on my own legs."

Percy resented the tone in which this hint was given, and, eager to show that he did not require any advice, took his place and raised the rifle to his shoulder.

"Aim low, and to the left," said the sergeant ; and Percy at once aimed high and to the right, then pulled the trigger as hard as he could, but nothing came of it.

"Why, the old thing won't go off," he said, angrily.

"Not while you keep it on half-cock," the

sergeant coolly replied, and everybody laughed, which made Percy feel all the more angry.

Once more he raised the rifle, holding it loosely to his shoulder, and trying to keep it from shaking in his hands. Then he shut his eyes and pulled the trigger desperately.

Bang ! went the cartridge, *Whrew-w-w-w* went the bullet, striking the ground not far off and ricocheting away into the fields ; down went the rifle on the grass, and head over heels rolled Percy, in a heap. The kick had been too much for him.

There was a roar of laughter as they picked him up, and somebody said,—

“ Why, man, you aimed at that hedge to the right. It’s a good thing there was no one there to get hit.”

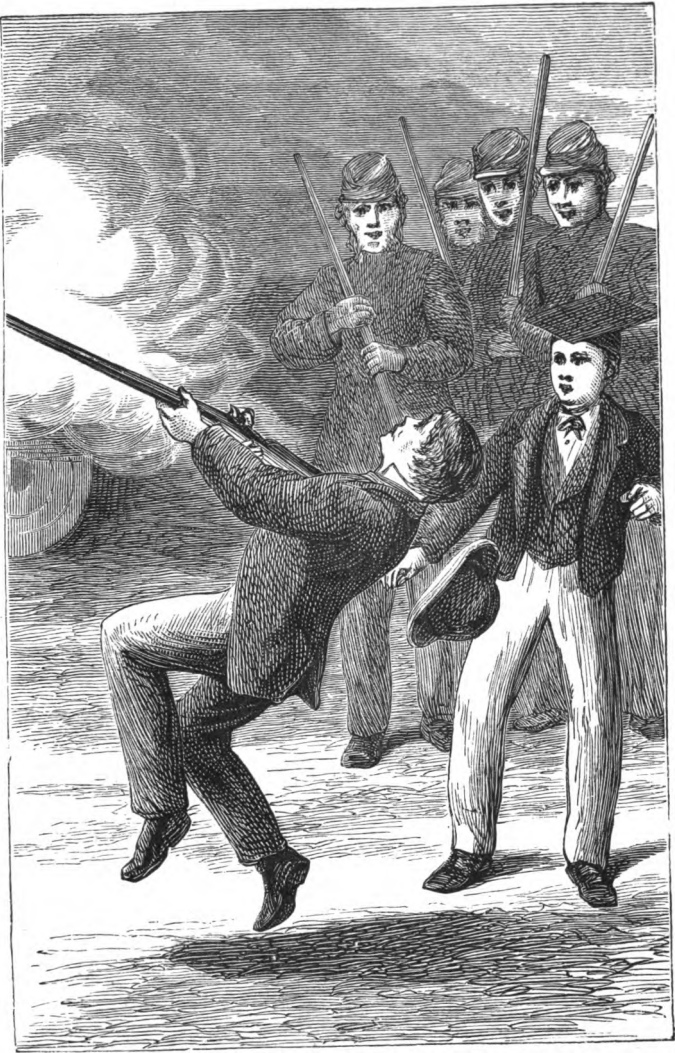
“ Something put me out just as I was taking aim,” muttered Percy.

“ Come ! no more wasting time,” said the sergeant. “ Squad, attention ! with ball cartridge—load ! ”

But before the ramrods were fairly at work, loud cries were heard in one of the adjoining fields ; a red flag was run up at the butts, and a bugle sang out, too-too-too-too, too-too-too-too.

“ Cease firing ! some one’s hurt ! ”

And to be sure, at a gap in the hedge about eighty yards on, an Irishwoman was waving her hands and shrieking,—



PERCY KNOCKED DOWN BY THE RIFLE.

"Oh, ye blackguards! do ye want to kill us all intirely? Stop! stop!" The rest of her speech was carried away by the wind, all except the words "Ye've killed him," which she kept repeating again and again.

Everybody looked at Percy, who turned very pale. Then the whole squad broke off and ran forward, regardless of the shouts of their sergeant, who had no notion of anything being done without due word of command. Finding himself deserted, he followed at the double, leaving Harry and Percy alone.

"Shall I go and see what has happened?" Harry asked, pitying his cousin with all his heart; for it was evident that Percy was in a sad fright.

"Yes, please; it was all an accident, said Percy, with trembling lips, and Harry sped off like an arrow to the gap in the hedge through which the rest of the party had passed, and were standing round something which lay a little forward in the field.

"I can run faster than any of these fellows. I'll go and fetch the doctor," thought Harry, as he leaped the ditch and made for this little crowd. A few bounds brought him among them; he pushed his way through, and saw——

But we must return to Percy, whose state of mind was most unenviable. The more he thought over the

consequences of his carelessness, the more alarmed he was. He did not know what to do. He durst not go forward to learn the whole truth ; he durst not wait to face the others and hear it from them ; he wished he had never meddled with a rifle, that he had shot himself rather than——oh, if he were only a hundred miles away ! His wonted coolness and self-satisfaction quite deserted him ; something must be done ; here were some of them coming back, and, in fact, not to mince the matter, Percy fairly ran away.

He ran on till he reached the town, and wandered about the streets, not knowing whither he was going, and felt sick and stupid with fear, and would have given everything in the world to have the past half-hour back again, and wished he had never left home, and found himself at length near the station, where he was told that a train would start for Renchester in ten minutes. He had just enough money in his pocket to buy a third-class ticket ; this seemed the best thing he could do, so he took his place in the train, and felt a certain sense of relief as it steamed out of Whitminster.

But his horror came back again when he looked out of the window and saw that they were passing within sight of the rifle-range. One glance showed him that the red flag had been pulled down, and that the volunteers had left ; then he turned away

his eyes, but he could not turn away his thoughts from the place. He felt that he could not think of it, and yet that he could think of nothing else. What had happened? Where had that bullet gone?

Percy spent a wretched time in the train, and we may well pity him; but be sure that troubles of this sort will be always hanging round persons who encourage a selfish and rashly confident disposition like his, and do not take care not to meddle with matters which they do not understand. We may see, though, that Percy's nature was not wholly bad, for now that he believed his rashness to have led to such a fatal result, he was more concerned for the harm that he had done, and scarcely thought of what might happen to himself in consequence. Indeed, it was not till the train was slackening speed at Renchester station that he asked himself what he was to do next. His only plan was to go home, and make the best story for himself that he could; but how should he find courage to tell such a story?

Percy was saved any doubt on this matter, for he had no sooner set foot on the Renchester platform than he saw his father, with Mr. and Mrs. Bryant, who were about to start for home; and talking with his father was a policeman.

Percy trembled and shrank back when he saw the policeman; as his father was a lawyer, and he heard

a great deal of talk about such matters, he was afraid he might be subject to arrest and imprisonment for what he had done. But his father saw him and beckoned to him, so Percy had no help for it, but came forward, looking pale and miserable.

"Well, sir, what is this you have been about?" said his father, sternly; but first dismissed the policeman, to whom he had been talking about some trial on which he was engaged.

Percy could find nothing to say, and stood before his father and uncle, a picture of dejection.

"A nice mess you have made! How often have I warned you against this foolish habit you have of fancying you can do everything. It's a mercy that it isn't one of your cousins you have shot."

"Well, don't say too much about it," said Mrs. Bryant, taking pity on her nephew. "It was an accident, I dare say."

"An accident—yes; but the sort of accident that generally has a fool at the bottom of it. Why, Percy, you know your uncle and aunt would rather you killed the best horse in the town than such a faithful old friend."

"I don't know his name," Percy ventured to say.

"Name! So far as his name goes, you could take

his place well enough, though you have not half as much sense. Why, sir, the least you can do is to tell your aunt that you are sorry."

Percy raised his eyes to Mrs. Bryant's face, but could say nothing. He was overwhelmed, bewildered; he did not quite understand it all, and only now it was beginning to strike him that it was odd they should know so soon what he had done.

"Who was it? who told you? how do you know?" he faltered out.

"Know! Of course your cousins told us, when they found you had run away instead of facing it out like a man. Percy, I'm very ill-pleased with you." Then his uncle pulled out a telegram, and handed it to Percy, who read:—"From H. Bryant, Whitminster, to H. Bryant, Esq., Mostyn Place, Renchester. *Percy has shot Booby. We can't find him. I think he has gone home. I mean Percy.*"

"There, sir! A fine morning's work!"

"Booby!" gasped Percy, "only Booby?"

"Only Booby!" cried his uncle. "I had rather you shot the whole Zoological Gardens than my poor old Booby."

But, to their amazement, Percy cried out, "Oh, I'm so glad!" and burst into tears.

"Come, Percy, we'll say nothing more about it," said Mrs. Bryant; but she had not time to console

him further, as the guard was calling to them to take their places.

And now that Percy's mind has been so much relieved, we must hasten to do the same for our anxious readers, and to assure them that poor Booby was not dead after all. The unlucky bullet had struck against a stone in the field, splintering it to pieces and then hitting one of the dog's paws, while at the same time he was cut about the face by some of the flying stones. When the volunteers came up, they had found him lying moaning and covered with blood, and at first had supposed that he was more seriously injured. But one of the men who was marking at the butts happened to be a veterinary surgeon, and he, after examining the wounded leg, performed an operation, which Booby bore like a man. He was carried to a neighbouring cottage, escorted by all the riflemen, who were in the right of it to take good care of him ; for, as it was, the story got abroad to their disadvantage, and the discredit of Percy's feat was reflected on the whole corps. It was long before the Whitminster Volunteers could appear in warlike array without the risk of hearing some rude boy shout in derision, " Who shot the dog ? "

In due time, Booby was pronounced convalescent, and, with an excellent appetite and an untarnished character, lived to a good old age upon three legs,

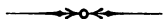
much respected by the dogs of the neighbourhood, though all he could now do was to wag his tail and bark out how fights were won, and the smallest little runaway cur might have insulted him with impunity. And you may imagine how he became much more of a pet than ever with his young masters and mistresses, and how the best bone and the cosiest place by the fire were now his by double right. Booby got lazy and fastidious in his old age, and I fear he rather chuckled over the comfort and consideration which his accident had procured him, and was inclined to advise starved dogs of his acquaintance to get themselves shot by a relation of the family. But Lotty, Dotty, Totty, and the rest, never looked at his wounded limb without regret, and without thinking of their cousin's first visit, and—his last.



STIRRING THE PUDDING.



STIRRING THE PUDDING.



NE of the latter evenings of November in the present year, a boy—I won't say who he was, for I believe he would not like to have his name known—was sitting by the parlour fire in a certain house in Whitminster. He was alone ; the rest of the family were down-stairs in the kitchen, engaged in the task of compounding the Christmas pudding, an important duty which, in that household, was always seen to betimes—weeks before the result had to be put to the proof of eating. This boy had stayed up-stairs because he was deep in the monthly numbers of a certain magazine with a well known cover ; and no false modesty shall prevent me from declaring that it was a series of stories, called

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"A Peck of Troubles," in which he was so much interested. He sympathized with Frank Fitzgerald under his persecutions; he thought Maria a foolish, stuck-up thing; he wondered if the Bryants were intended for any real persons; and he was eagerly turning over the page to learn if Abbing and Hammersley were caught, when the door was flung open, and one of his sisters bounced into the room crying, "Tom Tom, you must come and stir the pudding! It's for luck, you know."

"Bother the pudding!" said Tom. "I want to read this story."

Off went his sister without wasting any more precious time upon such an unenthusiastic person, and Percy went on reading till he had finished the stories, and the fire was nearly out, and the lamp was burning low. "H'm! not bad stories," he was pleased to say; "but I don't see why they should be called 'A Peck of Troubles;'" and with this he pitched the magazines on to the table, and went downstairs to patronize the proceedings for a minute or two.

When Tom entered the kitchen it presented an unusually animated appearance. Mamma, looking red and important, was presiding over a large pot upon a roasting fire. Sisters, with sleeves tucked up, were making themselves busy here and there. Small

brothers, allowed to sit up for this once only, were feasting on the fragments left over. The table was strewed with broken egg-shells, bits of lemon-peel, stones of raisins, bread-crumbs, and so forth. Cook was looking somewhat glum over it all; for, in the first place, she felt that her duties and dominions were being usurped by these amateur performances, and in the second place, it was she who would have to clear up the mess.

"Now then, aren't you going to let a fellow have a stir?" said Tom, popping a stray piece of citron into his mouth.

"Too late!" was the general chorus; "the pudding is in the cloth, and the cloth is in the pot; and you are sure to be unlucky because you would not come down to have a stir."

Tom smiled a lordly smile, as if in scorn of such childish superstition. Then, after hunting up a spare raisin or two, he stretched his arms and yawned, and announced that he was very tired and going to bed.

"Where are the candles?" said one of his sisters.

"Wait a minute, and I will fetch you one; I must open a new box."

"I don't want a candle," said Tom. "Do you think I am a little baby, afraid to go to bed in the dark?"

He said "Good night" all round, and made his way

up-stairs. When he reached his bedroom, he opened the door, and groped forward, meaning to pull up the blind and let in the moonlight. But as he incautiously felt his way, he came bump up against the dressing-table, and a smash let him know that some mischief had been done.

“Oh dear ! I have broken the water-bottle, or the looking-glass, or something,” he growled, and backing out to the door, went off to his sister’s room, where he thought there would be a box of matches.

He found the matches, returned, struck a light, and saw, to his dismay, that it was not the water-bottle he had broken, but a pretty vase which he had just bought with the savings of several weeks, as a present for his mother.

Tom felt extremely vexed as he picked up the pieces, and ruefully wished that he had waited to bring a light with him. But he did not choose to go down at once and proclaim the results of his want of caution ; so he kept his trouble to himself, and grumbled over it all the time he was undressing.

“They said I should be unlucky because I didn’t stir the pudding,” he thought. “I wonder if there is anything in that ? Certainly I have begun by being unlucky !”

But thinking over it did not mend the matter, and, very ill pleased, Tom went to bed and fell asleep ; to

dream that he had bought an ornamental vase for his mother to make a pudding in, and had broken it while stirring the said pudding.

Next morning, while he was dressing, the broken pieces again set Tom a-thinking gloomily.

“I wonder if I am going to be unlucky? If so, I had better look over my history, for I always break down in that, and I shall get finely stirred up, all for not having stirred that pudding.”

So when our friend came down-stairs, he was minded to have a look at his history. But the history was not to be seen, and though Tom looked for it high and low, he could not find it, as how should he, when he had carelessly left it under the pile of *Kind Words* which he had been reading the night before when he ought to have been doing his lessons, and the servant, putting the room in order, had packed them all away together in some dark corner of the book case!

The result of this was, that Tom had to go to school without his history either in his head or his hand, and trust, as he had too often done, to luck, that his deficiency would escape notice. But luck was against him, he feared, because he had not stirred the pudding; and Mr Tozer, the master of the school to which Tom went, was a terrible Turk, who was very careful to stir his puddings,—that is, to

examine his classes, and did not make so much use of kind words as of quite another article, which he thought more wholesome for idle pupils. And, sad to say, when school began, and Tom was invited to show that he had learned his history, it was soon made plain that he had not stirred this pudding with sufficient care. He didn't know how many wives Henry VIII. had, and when Mr. Tozer suggested half a dozen, he thought it was a joke and smiled uncomfortably. He was not prepared to say whether they died of old age or otherwise. He guessed that this king must have been succeeded by Henry IX., and, after much reflection, he fixed the date of the latter monarch's death at 1720. He positively declined to commit himself to any opinion as to the religious movements of the period, till at length, growing desperate, he made one or two random shots, and gave it as his opinion that the chief opponent of the Reformation in England was John Wycliffe, who was divorced from his wife by order of the Pope, and afterwards beheaded on the Field of the Cloth of Gold for the murder of Cardinal Wolsey.

Mr. Tozer, drawing out these remarkable replies, had been playing with Tom as a cat does with a mouse, but now he made a pounce on him, and exclaimed, "I can't allow this to go on any longer, sir! Day after day you come here and show that

you have not even looked at your history. I have warned you again and again, and now I see I must talk to you in another way. Come here, sir!"

Tom went *there*, and a scene ensued which I will not describe for fear of wounding the feelings of tender-hearted readers. Enough to say that for about a minute he was tingling with an intense regret not to have stirred the pudding. But if he had learned his history it would have been more to the purpose.

Thus troubles began to fall upon Tom, and he knew not but that others might be in store, for he had not stirred the pudding, and his performances in history were only a sample of the way in which he had learned the rest of his lessons. At least there was one bright ray in his prospects, for he had twopence in his pocket, and as he sat meditating over his hard lot, he remembered that at the play-time he could go to Mrs. Matthews' shop round the corner and buy comfort to the extent of twopence. Accordingly, when released for a few minutes, he slipped round the corner, and after surveying Mrs. Matthews' dainties with a thoughtful eye, concluded to lay out the twopence in gingerbread "snaps," as the most satisfying and lasting form of consolation available under the circumstances. With these in his pocket he came back to school, and took up his position

behind the largest dictionary he could borrow for the purpose, which he set upright before him, and every now and then, bending down as if to consult a book behind it, refreshed himself with a mouthful of this delicacy. But Mr. Tozer's eye was sharp. His suspicions were aroused by the fortification which Tom had erected; he had noticed that the young gentleman's pocket bulged out even more than usual; furthermore, he observed Tom's neighbours making signs to him and holding out their hands in importunate entreaty, and when he came to look at the boy's face, his mouth was seen to be ornamented with a kind of brown fringe that was not a moustache. So it came to pass that just as Tom was biting a nice piece out of his fourth snap, he was startled by Mr. Tozer's voice calling out his name, and sharply desiring him to "Come here!"

In his confusion Tom thrust all the rest of the snap into his mouth, and appeared before the master, gagged, as it were, by the proof his guilt.

"Oh, oh!" said Mr. Tozer, "eating again in school, and after all I have told you, Out with these untimely dainties! Come along, sir! Disgorge!"

So Tom, to the accompaniment of an unkind titter from all the boys, had to empty his pockets, and see his sweet snaps conveyed, at one fell swoop, into the master's drawer, in this dark prison to languish and

grow soft among a crowd of confiscated knives, and exercises, and bits of chalk, and the like. It was a sorry trick of fortune, and Tom, as he returned to his seat, might well wish that he had stirred the pudding—or had kept his twopence till school was quite over.

And soon he had still better reason to wish that he had not exhausted his exchequer. When he got home after school, he found that the cook was about to kill a fowl, and Tom besought to be allowed to try his hand as slaughterer. He had a catapult and some lead bullets in his room; these he fetched down, and, followed by all the junior members of the family, proceeded to the scene of execution.

Now followed an exciting piece of sport. Tom, after starting the wrong fowl two or three times, at length got upon the trail of the doomed one, a venerable Cochin China hen which was too tough for this world. He stalked it all about the garden, and fired two or three shots without even the effect of seriously alarming the victim, who would waddle on a little to get out of his way, and then begin to peck as serenely and calmly as if there were neither boys nor cooks in the world. The cook spoke slightly of Tom's skill as a marksman, and proposed to make short work in her own fashion. Tom was nettled at this, and at his loss of credit among his young brothers;

he begged cook to wait a minute, and, thinking he had a chance of a fair shot, took deliberate aim, fired, and broke the kitchen window, a catastrophe which at last frightened the poor hen so much that it turned about and ran cackling and fluttering right into the arms of the cook, who soon put an end to its fears and troubles.

As for Tom, he was sorely disconcerted, and still more so when his father scolded him for his carelessness, and told him he should have to pay for the broken window out of his own pocket-money. So with all his heart he wished he had stirred the pudding, or, at least, had taken care not to shoot in the direction of the kitchen window.

At dinner-time, something came to cheer his drooping spirits—a plum pudding, to wit. Not *the* plum pudding, of course, but a sort of experimental specimen pudding made of the fragments of the great work of which it was an earnest. Tom so highly approved of this pudding that he had two large helpings, though warned that dinner was late, and that he would have to be quick over it if he wished to be in time for school. The result was that this second helping of the pudding which he had not stirred did bring him just in time to be too late for school, and he had to wait outside in the passage for a few minutes while the door was locked and the

boys took their places, as was Mr. Tozer's rule. During these few minutes Tom looked about for some agreeable occupation, and we all know what is never wanting for idle hands to do. There was an umbrella lying in the corner. Tom was of opinion that it was not becoming in schoolboys to carry umbrellas ; besides, he thought this one belonged to young Jenkins, who was well known to be a sneak and a muff, and deserving of every mark of disapproval. So, as he happened to have a little piece of chalk in his pocket, he amused himself and one or two companions in misfortune by ornamenting the outside of the umbrella with a pretty pattern of dots and lines which could not fail to convey a desirable sense of disgust to young Jenkins' mind. He had not quite finished this work of art when the door was opened, and he had to march up between the desks to receive a scolding and an imposition before taking his place.

It was writing lesson that afternoon, and it behoved Tom to get out his copy-book and set to work on the line *Men make their own misfortunes*. But before he had written two lines his attention was drawn away, Mr. Tozer's attention being also engaged at that moment. It was the custom for one of the boys to be appointed each day to distribute pens and carry about blotting-paper and ink for who-

ever might need them. The boy who filled this office to-day, by name Rinder, was a facetious urchin, who was minded to relieve the monotony of his duties by a little playfulness. He had constructed a tail of bits of paper, which, as he passed along behind the desks, he would stick beneath the jacket collar of some unsuspecting youth, thereby causing great delight to the others whose eyes were not all fixed on their copy-books. This joke especially commended itself to Tom's mind, and quite forgetful that he had not stirred the pudding, he looked round to enjoy it, at the same time dipping his pen deep into the ink-bottle. Suddenly, Mr. Tozer looked round too, and then Tom turned sharp to his book, and in his haste shook out of his pen an enormous blot of ink, which fell right in the middle of the page.

This was a calamity indeed, for, be it known, Mr. Tozer had a special horror of blots, and showed no mercy to the unfortunate wretches who had fallen into such a heinous offence. What would he say when he saw this great round black one, just the shape of the pudding which Tom had not stirred! With the advice and sympathy of his neighbours, Tom did all that he could to do away with it; he licked it up with his tongue, he rubbed it with his finger, he borrowed a knife and scratched desperately,

but only succeeded in scratching a hole through the paper, and making the matter look worse than ever. Here was a trouble in store for the luckless boy who hadn't stirred the pudding! And it was close at hand, too, for as Tom ruefully gazed at the mess he had made, Mr. Tozer took his seat at the desk, opened his marking book, pulled up his shirt-collar, threw a look round the room to assure himself that everybody was busy, and called out severely, "Bring up your copy-books."

Every fortnight he made an examination of these books, when woe betide the careless scribblers! and now the ordeal was about to be gone through; so Tom might well wish that he had not neglected to stir the pudding. Row after row the boys came up in order, by threes, one showing his work while another stood by ready, and a third was just leaving his seat. Tom was willing to write carefully now, but his mind was occupied with gloomy forebodings, and he kept turning his head to see if his turn was not coming. At length it came, and he stood on the floor, with his copy-book in his hand, feeling somewhat like a malefactor about to be exposed to a lion in the public arena. His courage was not raised by seeing that Mr. Tozer was very ill pleased by the performance of his predecessor, and his spirits went down to zero as he advanced and laid his book on

the desk, open at the first page after the mark of the last examination.

"Bad!" said Mr. Tozer, grimly. "H'm—as usual. What's this?" he asked, pointing to a small smudge.

"I made a blot, sir," said Tom meekly to his master; and to himself, "What will he say when he sees the big one?"

"So I see," replied Mr. Tozer, dryly. "Turn over, sir. Dreadful! Worse and worse! Each page more careless than the last! Disgusting! Perfectly disgraceful! Really I can't allow this to pass! If I have told you once to make the tail of your 'g's' longer, I have told you seventy times! If you have nothing better to show than this—oh dear, when will you take more pains? Tut—tut—tut!"

By this time Tom had come to the last fatal page, and turning it over, tried to nerve himself for what would come, and to look unconscious and at ease. At that moment, Mr. Tozer's eye was attracted by some suspicious movements of Master Rinder, and he paused to fix a stern and searching gaze upon that youth, who immediately assumed an air of great diligence and demureness. This delay was thorough torture to Tom, who stood shuffling about by the master's side, with the unhappy blot ready to meet his eyes and gave himself up for lost. At length Mr. Tozer, having seen that all appeared to be

going on right looked down—and jumped up with a roar :—

“GET OUT OF MY SIGHT !”

Tom seized his copy-book and fled in such consternation that he scarcely knew how he regained his desk, but presently found himself seated there, recovering by degrees from the panic into which he had been thrown, and mournfully expecting every moment to be called out for another interview with his offended preceptor. But to his great relief nothing more was said to him ; Mr. Tozer found several boys in no better case than our friend, and contented himself with giving a lecture on carelessness all round, and threatening to be more strict for the future. So Tom drew breath again, and when school-time came to an end, promised himself to go and have a good game at prisoners’ base with the other fellows, and forget all about his unlucky failure to stir the pudding.

But as he joyfully snatched his cap and ran out into the playground, he heard something which interested him. Harrison—“ Bull ” Harrison—the biggest fellow and greatest bully in the school, was inquiring in loud and excited tones,—

“ Who has been playing tricks with my umbrella ? I’ll chalk him down for the best hiding he ever had ! He won’t want any more marks made when I’m done with him.”

"I know, Harrison," cried a little boy, eager to curry favour. "It was——"

Tom did not wait to hear the name. He rushed off homewards, leaving prisoners' base and Harrison far behind, and only slackened his pace when he knew that he had passed the house of the offended umbrella owner. Who would ever have thought it belonged to *him*?

There was no need for an umbrella to-night. The heavy clouds had passed off; it was freezing hard—the first frost of the year.

"Oh, how jolly! We shall have skating soon," said Tom to himself as he hurried down the hill, with his hands in his pockets, and tried if he could execute a slide in the road.

Tom, how often has your mother warned you not to run with your hands in your pockets? "As if I couldn't take care of myself!" you would mutter; but, remember, you have not stirred the pudding! Tom's foot slipped on a bit of ice; before he could take his hands out of his pockets and regain his balance, he fell backwards, and bumped his head on the ground.

Tom's head was hard, but so was the ground that night. As he picked himself up, he was strongly inclined to cry; but one or two small boys from his school being witnesses of the accident, he felt that he

could not show such weakness before them, and contented himself by saying, "Oh! oh!" by which he meant, "I wish I had stirred that pudding, or kept my hands out of my pockets."

He was almost home by this time, and lost no time in presenting himself before his sisters with a doleful face and a pitiful tale of his misfortune. Of course he was pitied and condoled with, for Tom, like other rude boys, might say of his sisters,—

"O woman, in our hours of ease,
No use to boys except to tease;
When pain and sickness wring the brow,
A ministering angel thou!"

So there was fetching of brown paper and vinegar and cold-water bandages, and Tom's head, having been examined and pronounced to have a lump on it as big as a small dumpling, was carefully bound up, and he took his place at the tea-table with all the dignity and privileges of an invalid, and the comfortable understanding that he was to be made much of for the rest of the evening, and was not to learn his lessons.

Whether it was from the knock on the head, or from having eaten too much of that pudding which he had not stirred, Tom had such a headache that soon after tea he found himself obliged to go to bed. There he lay in state, and one sister brought him oranges, and another sprinkled his forehead with

eau de Cologne and fanned it gently, and his brothers took care not to make a noise near the room, and after a time Tom's misfortunes for the day were ended, for he fell asleep.

And as he slept he had a strange dream. It seemed to him that he was lying in the kitchen, and the fire was burning and a great pot stood on it, empty; and the wall flew open, and there entered such a funny figure of a little grey, withered old man, leaning on crutches,—in fact, the very image of the author of this book. He nodded to Tom, hobbled up to the fire, and then began to unpack a bundle which he carried under his arm, and to pour the contents into a large bowl. First he threw in some queer little puppets—a lackadaisical, washed-out looking boy, who didn't seem as if he enjoyed life; a stuck-up, huffy girl, dressed in dark blue; a quick-tempered, good-hearted little fellow who was ticketed as her brother; a naughty boy who was always playing tricks and calling it "fun;" a big black dog with only three legs left; a bumptious, selfish youth, who thought he could do everything, and didn't care about other people's comfort. On the top of these he poured a peck of troubles; then mixed in a little good advice, chopped very fine; some half-dozen quotations, peeled and sliced; and a handful or so of small jokes. This done, he took a



TOM'S DREAM.

long pen and began to stir the mixture briskly, while at the same time he turned his head and addressed our friend Tom, who slept on and thought he was having an unpleasant dream.

“Young gentleman,” he said, severely—“and if there were any young ladies, I would have them also attend to what I am about to say,—this pudding has been made for your benefit. It is called ‘A Peck of Troubles,’ from the chief flavour used in its composition, a flavour of which you must be a strange creature if you do not know the taste. We have troubles every day; some of us have them for breakfast, dinner, and supper. All of us must eat at least a peck of them in the course of our lives; but few of us seem to understand where they come from, or how they may best be digested. Some of these troubles can’t be cured and must be endured; but of others I take leave to say that they come from our own imprudence, presumption, ill-temper, and disobedience. But I observe that when we have brought these troubles upon ourselves we are unwilling to put the blame in the right place, and constantly try to persuade people that something else is in fault; for instance, we say that we are unlucky, not because we have been careless or idle, but because we have omitted to *stir the pudding*.” (Tom moved and muttered in his sleep.)

“So I have taken some trouble with this pudding, which, though I have tried to make it taste as nice as possible, is nevertheless, mind you, a moral pudding, and is meant to do you good just as much as the blackest draught or the nastiest castor-oil. I think it will do you good if you take it at proper times and not in too great quantities. I don’t think it will do you good if you spend a whole evening over it and neglect your lessons.” (Tom tossed and turned uneasily.) “*Everybody has his own pudding to stir in this world, and must stir it for himself, and stir it well, if he wishes to keep out of troubles.* There! that is the last plum which I throw into my pudding, and now it is stirred enough.”

As he said this, the old man spread out a great sheet of brick-coloured paper, stamped all over with *Kind Words*, and prepared to wrap up the pudding in it. But here I shall end my story by hoping it may be lucky and well liked, for my part of the work is over when thus I have finished ‘STIRRING THE PUDDING.’

THE END.

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Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.—*Ephesians v. 1.*

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.—*1 Timothy i. 15.*

Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.—*Luke xv. 18.*

Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.—*1 John iii. 16.*

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.—*Matthew xxvi. 41.*

If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.—*1 John iv. 12.*

I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me.—*Proverbs viii. 17.*

Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.—*Hebrews xii. 2.*

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.—*John x. 27.*

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.—*Psalms cxix. 105.*

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Follow after charity.
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Harden not your hearts.
The Lord is risen indeed.
Follow peace with all men.

All things are of God.
The sting of death is sin.
The Lord is my helper.

Third Series.

I love them that love Me.
I will give you rest.
By grace ye are saved.

Ask, and ye shall receive.
I am the bread of life.
Love is of God.

Fourth Series.

Teach me, O Lord.
Pray without ceasing.
Hallowed be Thy name.

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Stand fast in the Lord.
Thy word is truth.

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|---|---|
| 1 The Wise Men's Offering | 22 Pharaoh in Pursuit of the Israelites |
| 2 Christ among the Doctors | 23 Moses viewing the Promised |
| 3 Return with Joseph and Mary | 24 Death of Saul [Land |
| 4 Christ blessing the Children | 25 Joash shooting Arrows at the |
| 5 Christ and the Woman of Samaria | Command of Elisha |
| 6 Christ curing the Deaf | 26 The Signal of Fire |
| 7 The Saviour and Nicodemus | 27 Interpretation of the Mysterious Writing |
| 8 Nathanael coming to Jesus | 28 "Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour unto the evening" |
| 9 Christ turneth Water into Wine | 29 Beating the Swords into Ploughshares |
| 10 The Sermon on the Mount | 30 Buying Water in a Time of Distress |
| 11 Jesus raising the Ruler's Daughter | 31 Peter denying his Lord |
| 12 Christ feedeth the Multitude | 32 The Lost Sheep |
| 13 David playing before the Ark | 33 Parable of the King and his Servants |
| 14 Abraham's Servant & Rebekah | 34 Repentance of Judas |
| 15 The Firstfruits | 35 Christ foretelling the Destruction of Jerusalem |
| 16 Daniel in the Den of Lions | 36 Parable of the Talents |
| 17 The Finding of Moses | |
| 18 Rahab and the Spies | |
| 19 Abraham offering Isaac | |
| 20 The Israelites encompassing the Walls of Jericho | |
| 21 David and Goliath | |

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Old Testament.

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| 2 The Finding of Moses | 6 The First Plague |
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| 4 Moses' Doubts removed | 8 The Exodus |

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| 10 The Bitter Water sweetened | 18 The Three Great Feasts |
| 11 Bread from Heaven | 19 The Mission of the Spies |
| 12 Defeat of Amalek [Mount | 20 Israel's Unbelief |
| 13 Moses descending from the | 21 The Smitten Rock |
| 14 The Golden Calf | 22 The Serpent of Brass |
| 15 The People forgiven [ture | 23 The True Prophet |
| 16 The Tabernacle and its Furni- | 24 The Death of Moses |

New Testament.

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|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 25 The Beginning of the Gospel | 37 The Deaf Mute |
| 26 The Authority of Jesus | 38 The Evil Spirit cast out |
| 27 The Leper healed | 39 The Mind of Christ |
| 28 The Publican called | 40 Blind Bartimæus |
| 29 Jesus and the Sabbath | 41 The Fig Tree withered |
| 30 Power over Nature | 42 The Two Commandments |
| 31 Power over Demons | 43 Hypocrisy and Piety |
| 32 Power over Disease | 44 The Anointing at Bethaay |
| 33 Power over Death | 45 The Betrayal |
| 34 Martyrdom of the Baptist | 46 The Denial |
| 35 The Five Thousand fed | 47 The Crucifixion |
| 36 The Syro-Phœnician Mother | 48 The Risen Lord |

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Old Testament.

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|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Abraham and Isaac ascending | The Worship of the Golden Calf |
| Mount Moriah | The Brazen Serpent |
| Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's | Samson slaying the Lion |
| Dream | Ruth in the Field of Boaz |
| The Meeting of Jacob and Joseph | Speak, Lord; for Thy servant |
| in Egypt | heareth |
| The Finding of Moses [ments | Elijah restoring the Widow's Child |
| Moses rehearsing the Command- | David and Goliath |

New Testament.

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|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Suffer little children to come unto | The Crucifixion |
| Me | Peter preaching at Pentecost |
| The Man born Blind | Paul at Athens |
| Jesus feeding the Multitude | Paul's Defence to King Agrippa |
| The Widow's Mite | The Shipwreck of Paul |
| Christ's Entry into Jerusalem | Paul in Prison |
| The Betrayal of Jesus | |

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